



U.S. Department of  
Agriculture  
**Career Intern  
Program**



Mentor/Protege Handbook  
[http://www.usda.gov/da/employ  
/intern.htm](http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/intern.htm)

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

**USDA CAREER INTERN  
MENTORING HANDBOOK**

	<u>Page</u>
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
Purpose . . . . .	1
Recommendations for Use . . . . .	2
What is Mentoring? . . . . .	2
<b>Mentor Roles and Responsibilities</b> . . . . .	6
Mentor Directions . . . . .	6
Mentoring Roles . . . . .	6
<b>Mentor and Protege Characteristics</b> . . . . .	18
Desired Characteristics of a Mentor . . . . .	18
Desired Characteristics of a Protege . . . . .	21
<b>Protege's Role</b> . . . . .	24
Various Roles of a Protege . . . . .	24
<b>Essentials of a Mentoring Relationship</b> . . . . .	25
Five Essentials of a Mentoring Relationship . . . . .	25
<b>Mentoring Process</b> . . . . .	30
A Six-Step Mentoring Process . . . . .	30

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

**USDA CAREER INTERN  
MENTORING HANDBOOK**

	<u>Page</u>
<b>Mentoring Skills</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Skill Building</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Listening Skills</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Counseling</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Career Advising</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Types of Mentoring</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Three Types of Mentoring</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Traditional Mentoring</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Planned Mentoring</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Self-Mentoring</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Mentoring Stages</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>The Four Stages of Mentoring</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>Obstacles in a Mentoring Relationship</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Overcoming Obstacles in the Relationship</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Benefits of Mentoring</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>What are Some Benefits?</b> .....	<b>56</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

---

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a "map" to guide you on the road to successful mentoring—a road that in recent years, is becoming far more traveled. It is not that mentoring is a new concept; in fact, mentoring has existed as far back as ancient Greek history. It is only that the road has been repaved with new ideas and styles that require a directional tool (i.e., map) for a successful journey.

This handbook guides you through the mentoring process—what it means to be a mentor, the roles and responsibilities during your tutelage, and the different styles that you can adopt to meet the unique demands of a mentoring relationship. The mentor-protege relationship is charted from beginning to end by providing tips on how to identify a protege, cultivate the relationship, and avoid "obstacles" that can detour a mentor-protege relationship. Finally, this handbook outlines the positive effects of traveling this road—effects that are shared by the mentor, the protege, and the organization.

In addition to other sources, the content of this handbook is derived from former mentors and proteges of the Federal Government from different levels and disciplines, who have offered their experiences, tips, and suggestions to help you on your way to a successful internship.

## INTRODUCTION

---

### Recommendations for use

This handbook is a job aid that contains comprehensive information on mentoring, with tips, suggestions, and examples to supplement this information. It is recommended that you read all sections of the handbook at least once. After you have read the material, refer to the handbook whenever necessary. You may find that you refer to some sections more than others.

**For Example:** You may find it helpful to refer frequently to the section on "Mentoring Stages" to help you adjust to your continually changing mentor-protege relationship. Or, from time to time, you may want to refresh your memory on the "Essentials of a Mentoring Relationship" to remind you of what it takes to be a successful mentor/protege.

Remember, this handbook is a "map" that guides you on the road to successful mentoring. You need to decide how to best use this tool.

### What is Mentoring?

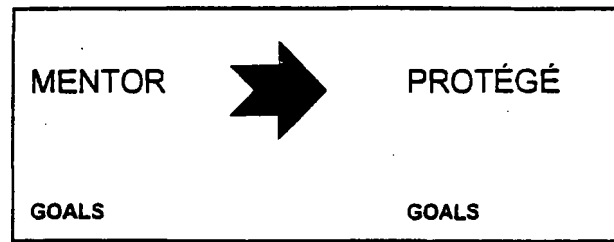
*"Mentoring is an open vista of new experiences and possibilities."*

One usually charts unfamiliar territory when attempting to define "mentoring." Mentoring is not a term that is easy to define because it is an ever-changing process. The mentoring process links an experienced person (mentor) with a less experienced person (protege) to help foster the career development and professional growth of the protege.

The mentoring process requires that the mentor and protege work together to reach specific goals and to provide each other with sufficient feedback to ensure that the goals are reached. One mentor describes mentoring as "a process by which you open a passageway to knowledge by sharing ideas and information."

## INTRODUCTION

---



A mentor facilitates personal and professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years. The desire to want to share these “life experiences” is characteristic of a successful mentor.

A successful mentor is also characterized as:

- **Supportive** - A mentor is one who supports the needs and aspirations of the protégé. This supportive attitude is critical to the successful development of the protégé. A mentor must encourage the protégé to accept challenges and overcome difficulties.
- **Patient** - A mentor is patient and willing to spend time performing mentoring responsibilities. A mentor provides adequate time to interact with the protégé. Time requirements are defined by both the mentor and the protégé.
- **Respected** - A mentor is someone who has earned the respect of peers, the organization, and/or the community. It is important that this person be someone to whom others can look at as a positive role model.

Just as a mentor is more than a teacher, a protégé is more than a student. A protégé, as a bright and motivated individual, is the future of an organization; the insurance that a well-trained, high-quality workforce will exist to meet long-term employment needs. Protégés represent a wide range of individuals in terms of age and work experience. One mentor described a protégé as a “diamond in the rough—ready to be cut and polished into the type of employee the organization needs.”

## INTRODUCTION

---

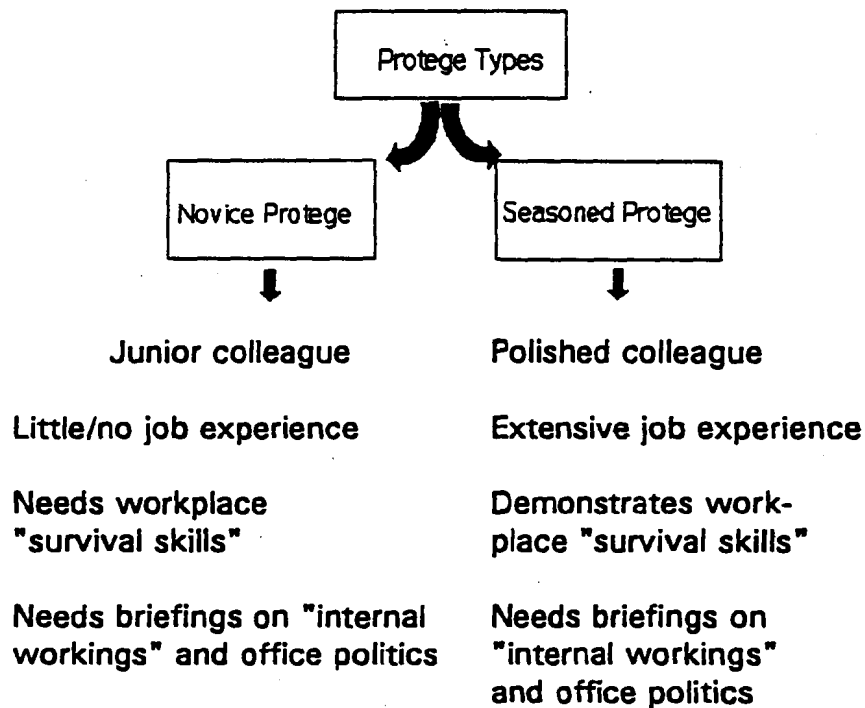
A protege is an achiever—"groomed" for advancement by being provided opportunities to excel beyond the limits of his/her position. These opportunities are especially important in assisting proteges who are women, minorities, or individuals with disabilities to rise to higher career levels, whether supervisory, technical, or administrative.

Most people imagine a protege to be new to the working world; however, there are two types of proteges.

- The first type is the novice employee, the junior colleague who needs to be taught everything about surviving in the workplace.
- The second type is the seasoned, politically sophisticated person who transfers to, or is hired into, a new office. This type of protege already knows the "survival skills," such as time management, planning, delegating, and how to interact with others.

A seasoned protege typically only needs to be instructed on the inner workings and policies of the specific office, the Agency, and/or the Department.

The differences in the two types of protege are compared below.



## **INTRODUCTION**

---

Together, the mentor and protege share mentoring experiences that, over time, can build a successful and enriching relationship. Of course, the success of this relationship depends on both the mentor and the protege. Both you and your protege must want the relationship to work. You must cooperate with each other to make the most of the experience.

**TIP:** Watch for signals of "lopsided" mentoring. This occurs when one party is devoting more time and energy to the mentoring process than the other. In most cases, efforts should be equal. Make sure you both are committing time and energy to the process.

The success of the mentoring relationship also depends on how well the mentoring relationship is defined. You need to know each other's expectations. Once you have a clear understanding of these expectations you will be able to ensure that each other's objectives are being met. One mentor remarks, "Once we told each other what we expected from each other, we were able to build a framework for our relationship."

Finally, you must be concerned with the overall development of your protege. You should be the influencing force behind your proteges professional growth--providing on-the-job guidance, promoting participation in training, and assisting in career decisions--to cultivate overall development.

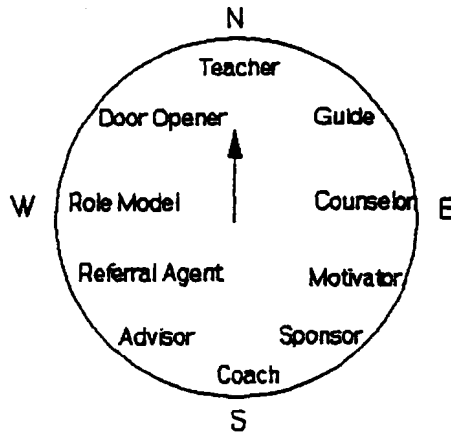


## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

### **Mentor Directions**

Like marks around a compass, the roles you assume as a mentor point you in many different directions. There are ten different roles a mentor can assume:



Which role you assume depends on the needs of your protege and on the relationship you build with your protege. On any given day, your protege may require you to perform one of these roles, or all of these roles.

**For Example:** You may begin your day heading due north, assuming the role of teacher, when suddenly your protege experiences performance difficulties. You change direction and head due south to fulfill your role as coach, steering slightly southwest to perform the role of advisor as your protege asks for advice on a satisfactory course of action.

Over time, and with experience, you will learn how to assume different roles more easily. Each of the roles are explained in the next section to help you prepare for the different directions you will take.

### **Mentoring Roles**

#### **TEACHER**

As a teacher, you may need to teach the protege the skills and knowledge required to perform the job successfully. This role requires you to outline the "nuts

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

and bolts" of the position and to share your experiences as a seasoned professional.

To teach the fundamentals of the position, you need to first determine what knowledge and skills are necessary to successfully perform the requirements of the position.

**TIP:** Review the position description and performance standards of the job to help you identify the knowledge and skills required for the position.

Once you have identified the knowledge and skills that the position requires, you then need to identify what knowledge and skills the protege already has and what knowledge and skills require development. Then, concentrate your efforts on helping your protege develop his/her knowledge and skills.

**TIP:** If you are your protege's supervisor, you may assign specific tasks, set deadlines, and frequently review your protege's work to discover what knowledge and skills need to be developed.

It is in your best interest to ensure that your protege develops professionally. There are many different ways you can develop your protege. You should make a point of explaining, in detail, what you expect from your protege.

If you are helping your protege develop critical job tasks, provide examples or samples, when possible, for the protege to follow.

The most important developmental method you can use is to answer the questions your protege poses. Keep in mind that you are not required to be the "expert" on everything. A good mentor knows when to direct the protege to a knowledgeable source. Knowledgeable sources can be a person or materials (e.g., handbook, diagram, chart, computer).

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

**TIP:** Additional sources of information are seminars, conferences, and night classes.

As a teacher, it is important that you share the wisdom of past mistakes. A protege can not only learn from your errors, but also can realize that no one is perfect. Make a point to relate these learning experiences, special anecdotes, and "trials" whenever appropriate. It is this sharing of information that strengthens the mentor-protege relationship.

### **GUIDE**

As a guide, you help navigate through the inner workings of the organization and decipher the "unwritten office rules" for your protege. This information is usually the "kernels of knowledge" that one only acquires over a period of time. The inner workings of the organization are simply the "behind the scenes" dynamics, or office politics, that are not always apparent, but are crucial to know. The "unwritten rules" can include the special procedures your office follows, the guidelines that are not always documented, and policies under consideration.

As a mentor, it is important that you explain the inner workings and "unwritten rules" to your protege. Brief your protege on who does what, the critical responsibilities that each performs, and the office personalities involved.

**TIP:** Instruct your protege to review key policy handbooks. Then begin a question/answer session with the protege about the rules and regulations contained in the handbook. This session can lead into a discussion about the inner workings and unwritten rules of the organization.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

### **COUNSELOR**

The role of counselor requires you to establish a trusting and open relationship. To create a trusting relationship, you need to stress confidentiality and show respect for the protege. You can promote confidentiality by not disclosing personal information that the protege shares with you. Show respect by listening carefully and attentively to the protege and by not interrupting while your protege is talking.

To establish a trusting and open relationship, you need to make the protege feel comfortable. Non-verbal gestures can help create an acceptable "comfort level" with your protege. Non-verbal gestures include:

- **Eye Contact** - Use appropriate eye contact. Be sensitive to cultural and communicative tendencies as to what is considered appropriate eye contact. For example, in some cultures, direct eye contact is considered appropriate during listening and speaking. Whereas in other cultures, dropping the eyes or averting the eyes during listening shows respect and direct eye contact during speaking is appropriate.
- **Gestures** - Supplement your speech with facial and hand gestures. One way to use hand gestures is to express enthusiasm. You can show enthusiasm by nodding approval, smiling, or shaking the other person's hand.
- **Open Body Posture** - Keep an "open" body posture. Rest your arms casually at your side or on a surface, and lean forward as if eager to hear the next word.
- **Appropriate Space** - Consider how space can relate to power. A large desk might be seen as a barrier between you and your protege. You should position your chairs next to each other, rather than across from one another, to bridge the distance while talking.

Maintain proper physical distance from people when talking to them. Most people feel that it is an attack on their personal space if you stand within six inches of them while speaking. Ideally, there should be no more than one and a half feet between the two or you. The better you know someone, the more acceptable it is to stand close.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

The counselor role also encourages a protege to develop problem-solving skills. A protege must be able to think through problems rather than always depending on you to provide a solution. You can develop the protege's problem-solving skills by advising the protege to first attempt to solve the problem before seeking assistance.

**For Example:** Shing Ju, a Personnel Specialist, wanted to develop her protege's problem-solving skills. Each time her protege, Roland, asked for her assistance to a specific case problem, she requested that he first list a minimum of three plausible solutions to the problem. Once Roland generated three or more solutions, Shing Ju discussed the pros and cons of each solution with him and helped select one of his options, with perhaps some minor modifications. By not providing Roland a solution to every case problem, Shing Ju taught Roland how to solve problems on his own.

**TIP:** Ask your protege questions such as:  
"How would you solve the problem?" or  
"What do you think the solution is?" in  
order to sharpen problem-solving abilities.

### **MOTIVATOR**

As a motivator, you may at times need to generate motivation within your protege. Motivation is an inner drive that compels a person to succeed. It's not often you will find an unmotivated protege. In general, most proteges are enthusiastic about their job. After all, proteges tend to be characterized as highly motivated individuals with a thirst for success. You usually perform the role of motivator only when you need to motivate your protege to complete a difficult assignment, or to pursue an ambitious goal. Through encouragement, support, and incentives, you can motivate your protege to succeed.

One of the most effective ways to encourage your protege is to frequently provide positive feedback during an assigned task or while the protege strives toward a goal. Positive feedback is a great "morale booster" that removes doubt and builds self-esteem and results in your protege feeling a sense of accomplishment. Concentrate on what the protege is doing well and relate these successes to your protege.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

You can also motivate your protege by showing your support. Show your support by making yourself available to your protege, especially during stressful periods. An open door policy is perhaps the best way to show your support. Keep in mind that an open door policy means that your door is **always** open to your protege and not just open when it is convenient for you. You need to be consistent about your availability. A protege that knows you are always available will not be intimidated to ask questions and seek guidance.

Motivate your protege by creating incentives. To create an incentive, you need to explain what the protege can gain from completing a task or "fine tuning" a skill.

**TIP:** Remember that incentives extend beyond the tangible. Offer incentives such as praise, a chance to attend an interesting seminar, or verbal recognition to peers at a staff meeting.

If you are your protege's supervisor, then offer an opportunity to work on an interesting project.

**For Example:** While working on routine tasks, Juanita expressed an interest in working on a project that involved long-range planning. As an incentive, Juanita's mentor promised her an opportunity to gain this experience on a future project.

### **SPONSOR**

A sponsor creates opportunities for the protege--opportunities that may not otherwise be made available. These opportunities can relate directly to the job or indirectly to the protege's overall professional development. The goal of a mentor is to provide as much exposure for the protege as possible, with a minimum of risks. Opportunities should challenge and instruct without slicing away the protege's self-esteem. A protege should not be set up for failure. New opportunities can increase the visibility of your protege, but you must be careful in selecting these opportunities.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

Only you know when your protege is ready to take on new opportunities. It will be apparent to you when your protege has mastered all required tasks and seeks new responsibilities.

**TIP:** Speak to people in other positions to procure projects for your protege.

### **COACH**

At times you may need to perform the role of coach to help a protege overcome performance difficulties.

Coaching is a complex and extensive process. Before you begin, you need to answer three questions:

- Does the protege have the capacity to do the job?
- Is coaching likely to upgrade the protege's skills?
- Is there sufficient time to coach?

Coaching is not an easy skill to perform. Specifically, coaching involves feedback. Mentors need to give different kinds of feedback, as the situation demands.

- Behavior that you want to reinforce requires positive feedback.
- Behavior you wish to change requires constructive feedback.

Both types of feedback are critical to your protege's professional growth.

If you know how to provide feedback to your protege, you can perform the role of coach more easily. There are four factors to consider when providing feedback:

1. You need to give frequent feedback. By giving feedback often, your protege will have a clear understanding of his/her progress.
2. You need to give economical feedback. By offering quality feedback, your protege will appreciate the feedback more.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

3. You need to give **specific** feedback. You should focus the feedback on how, when, and why.
4. You need to give **direct** feedback on what you have read or observed. You shouldn't discuss matters you have heard secondhand.

Factors to consider when giving constructive feedback are:

- Be descriptive about the behavior
- Don't use labels such as "immature" or "unprofessional"
- Don't exaggerate
- Don't be judgmental
- Phrase the issue as a statement, not a question.

When giving feedback to your protege, concentrate on the behavior that you would like your protege to do more of, do less of, or continue performing.

It is important that you do not give feedback when:

- You don't know much about the circumstances of the behavior.
- The time, place, or circumstances are inappropriate (for example, in the presence of others).

**TIP:** Set up a time to provide feedback to your protege. These feedback sessions can be scheduled on an hourly, daily, or weekly basis, depending on need.

### **ADVISOR**

This role requires you to help the protege develop professional interests and set realistic career goals. As the old saying goes, "If you don't know where you are going, you won't know how to get there." This saying holds true for a protege's professional development. In the role of advisor, you need to think about where the protege wants to go professionally. That is, you need to help the protege set career goals. There are several factors to consider when setting career goals.



## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

Goals should be **specific**. Goals need to be clearly explained, using details about what the protege wants to achieve.

Goals must be **timeframed**. You both need to plan an overall timeframe for goals with interim deadlines to ensure that your protege is moving toward these goals. It's important not to make goals too future oriented. In general, you should keep goal timeframes within a three-year range.

Goals should be **result-oriented**. You need to concentrate on the results of your efforts, not so much on the activities that are required to accomplish them. An activity provides a way of reaching the goal, but the end result (the goal) should not be neglected.

Goals must be **relevant**. The goals must be appropriate and in tune with USDA while moving the protege closer to the type of work that he/she finds challenging and enjoyable.

Goals must be **reachable**. The goals must be within the protege's reach. The protege needs to feel challenged, but not incapable of reaching the goals. You must consider the special talents of your protege and weigh these talents with the requirements of the position for which your protege strives. You need to create the right career "fit" for your protege.

You may want to create several career goals to eliminate the possibility of your protege feeling "trapped." However, goals should be limited in number. You need to avoid setting too many goals at once. Concentrate first on setting goals that will help your protege accomplish what needs to be done.

Keep in mind that set goals need to be flexible enough to accommodate changes in the workplace and changes in your protege's interests. Goals should not be set so rigid that adjustments can't be made. Sometimes changes in USDA will require you to alter your protege's goals.

Think of how your protege will reach his/her career goals. There are several career building alternatives you can offer your protege.

- **Enrichment** - Enhancing the skills and responsibilities of the current job.
- **Reassignment** - Moving to another position with the same or new duties, without a change in pay.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

- **Detail** - A temporary assignment with the employee returning to his/her regular duties at the end of the detail.
- **Promotion** - Changing to a position at a higher grade level and pay or moving up the career ladder.
- **Change to Lower Grade** - A position at a lower grade level sometimes at a lower rate of pay (often necessary to qualify for another occupation).

**For Example:** Thomas, an Accounting Manager, recommended to Sheila, his protege, a lateral move to Accounts Receivable when he realized that Sheila had a strong interest and ability for finances.

### **REFERRAL AGENT**

Once career goals are set, you then are likely to assume the role of referral agent. As a referral agent, work with your protege to develop an **action plan** that outlines what knowledge, skills, and abilities a protege needs to meet his/her career goals. There are several steps that you and your protege need to follow when developing a career action plan.

1. **Target the areas that require development.** To target developmental areas, you need to know the requirements of the future position. Perhaps talk to people who hold the position, or visit your personnel office to obtain written information about the position. You should identify the critical knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required of the future position. Weigh these against the knowledge, skills, and abilities that your protege already possesses. Are there any that require development? What knowledge needs to be acquired and skills honed to meet the demands of the future position?
2. **Select developmental activities.** Choose or recommend activities (tasks) that your protege can undertake to develop the critical knowledge, skills, and abilities required of the future position. Examples of developmental activities for your protege include:
  - Assigning job enrichment responsibilities
  - Participating in a temporary assignment
  - Attending workshops, conferences, or seminars
  - Enrolling in college and university courses

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

- Participating in cross training or job rotation.
3. **Determine success indicators.** Your protege needs to have a clear vision of what are the desired results of the developmental activity. Your protege needs to be able to answer the question, "How will I know I've succeeded?" It's not important what indicators you use, except that these indicators must be measurable and meaningful to the protege.

**For Example:** If the developmental area is "writing skills," success indicators might include writing clear/concise proposals, proper use of the principles of speech, and good sentence structure.

Once you have an action plan in place, you can then use the action plan as an "enabler" to move your protege toward the career goals that you help to set under the role of advisor.

### **ROLE MODEL**

As a role model, you are a living example of the values, ethics, and professional practices of USDA. Most proteges, in time, imitate their mentors; as the proverb states, "Imitation is the sincerest flattery." Learning by example may be your most effective teaching tool. Your protege will learn a lot about you while he/she observes how you handle situations or interact with others. For this reason, you need to be careful of how you come across to your protege. You must strive for high standards of professionalism, solid work ethics, and a positive attitude. You should give your protege an opportunity to learn the positive qualities of an experienced professional.

**TIP:** When possible, take your protege to various meetings or workgroups so that the protege can observe you in different settings or situations.

## **MENTOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

---

### **DOOR OPENER**

The role of door opener opens up doors of opportunity. This role primarily involves helping the protege establish a network of contacts within USDA, as well as outside of the Department. A protege needs a chance to meet other people to spur professional, as well as, social development. As a door opener, you can introduce your protege to many of your own contacts to help build the protege's own network structure.

Stress to your protege that networking is directly related to the number of people at USDA from whom you can seek assistance or provide advice. To increase your protege's awareness of personal contacts, ask your protege to consider the number of people who he/she knows within the Agency and the Department. Your protege may want to consider:

- With whom do I talk frequently at USDA?
- With whom do I take lunch breaks?
- With whom at work do I discuss my problems or concerns?

As a door opener, you also open doors of information for your protege by steering the protege to resources that he/she may require.

**For Example:** Roberta needed procurement information from the General Services Administration (GSA), but did not know who to contact at the agency. She asked her mentor for advice. Her mentor not only knew people at GSA, but was able to provide the name of the person who could provide the procurement information.

## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---

### **Desired Characteristics of a Mentor**

To successfully assume the different roles of a mentor, you need to display certain characteristics. As previously mentioned, a successful mentor is characterized as supportive, patient, and respected. You may wonder what other characteristics a successful mentor should possess. Read the following checklist to see what these other characteristics are.



#### **People Oriented**

A mentor is one who is genuinely interested in people and has a desire to help others. A successful mentor is one who has "good people skills;" that is, knows how to effectively communicate and actively listen. A mentor must also be able to resolve conflict and give appropriate feedback.



#### **Good Motivator**

A mentor is someone who inspires a protege to do better. A mentor needs to be able to motivate a protege through encouraging feedback and challenging work assignments. One mentor best describes this characteristic by saying, "A mentor needs to stretch a protege's potential, setting new limits for what the protege can do."



#### **Effective Teacher**

A mentor must thoroughly understand the skills required of the protege's position and be able to effectively teach these skills to his/her protege. A mentor must not only teach the "skills of the trade," but also manage the learning of the protege. This means that a mentor must actively try to recognize and use teaching opportunities.

As a mentor, you should take an active interest in **planned** teaching activities. A "sink or swim" approach is not an effective teaching method.

## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---

In addition to teaching the mechanics of the job, a mentor must gradually impart the "internal workings" of USDA to the protege. The "internal workings" include the "sacred cows," the "shalls and the shall nots," and the "politics" that are found in every organization.



### **Secure in Position**

A mentor must be confident in his/her career so that pride for the protege's accomplishments can be genuinely expressed. A mentor should appreciate a protege's developing strengths and abilities, without viewing these accomplishments as a threat. A secure mentor delights in a protege's discoveries and welcomes a protege's achievements. In truth, a mentor enjoys being a part of the protege's growth and expansion.



### **An Achiever**

A mentor is usually a professional achiever—one who sets lofty career goals, continually evaluates these goals, and strives to reach them. A mentor is usually one who takes on more responsibilities than is required, volunteers for more activities, and tends to climb the proverbial career ladder at a quick pace.

A mentor attempts to inspire a protege with this same drive for achievement. This "attempt at achievement" is the flint that sparks a protege's desire for career success. In this way, a mentor helps a protege to set, evaluate, and reach career goals.



### **Able to Give Protege Visibility**

A mentor is someone who can give the protege the right amount of exposure within USDA. One way to give exposure is to secure challenging projects for the protege. Another way is to talk with others about the protege's accomplishments.

## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---



### **Values USDA and Work**

A mentor takes pride in USDA and relishes the every day challenges that typically arise. A mentor understands the mission, vision, and value of USDA and supports the Department/Agency initiatives. A mentor should be well versed in USDA policies and in the procedures of the particular agency in which he/she works. Keep in mind that a protege looks to his/her mentor for guidance on interpreting USDA policies and procedures. To provide this guidance, you need to know and understand the information.



### **Respects Others**

A mentor is one who shows regard for another's well-being. Every person, including the mentor, has certain vulnerabilities and imperfections that must be accepted. A mentor should learn to accept a protege's weaknesses and minor flaws, just as the protege must learn to accept the weaknesses and flaws of the mentor.

Mentors can, in fact, help a protege explore his/her vulnerabilities and imperfections. One protege admits that her mentor helped her to reach a higher level of self acceptance. She says, "My mentor helped me arrive at a new understanding of who I am ..."

Without passing judgment, a mentor must also recognize that differences in opinions, values, and interests will exist. By accepting such differences, a mentor projects an openness to others.

Not all of these characteristics are found in equal number in every one. If you fall short in one or several of these characteristics, it does not mean that you can not be a successful mentor. It just means that you need to strengthen those characteristics that you think are a bit weak.

## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---

### **Desired Characteristics of a Protege**

A successful mentoring relationship not only depends on the characteristics of the mentor, but also on the characteristics of the protege. Most USDA mentors will probably find some of the same characteristics in their protege that they see in themselves. The checklist below outlines the characteristics of the "ideal" protege.



#### **Eagerness to Learn**

A protege has a strong desire to learn new skills and abilities, or a desire to develop existing skills and abilities. A protege seeks educational and/or training opportunities whenever possible to broaden his/her capabilities. A protege strives to elevate his/her level of technical skills and professional expertise to gain an ever greater mastery of the job.



#### **Ability to Work as a Team Player**

A protege usually must interact with many others as a part of the requirement of his/her position. Therefore, it is important that the protege cooperate and communicate with these individuals.

A protege must learn how to be a team player--to contribute as much as possible to the mentoring relationship. To do this, a protege should:

- Initiate and participate in discussions
- Seek information and opinions
- Suggest a plan for reaching goals
- Clarify or elaborate on ideas
- Try to ease tension between parties
- Resolve differences
- Be fair with praise and criticism
- Accept praise and criticism.



## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---



### **Patient**

A protege must be willing to put time and effort into the mentoring relationship. A protege must persevere through the difficulties that arise during the learning process. Many proteges, at one time or another, feel frustrated because they feel confined in their current job, or "hemmed in" by everyday tasks. A protege should be realistic enough to know that career advancement does not happen overnight.



### **Risk Taker**

As a risk taker, a protege must be willing to travel from the "safe harbor" into the seas of uncertainty. This means that a protege must move beyond tasks that he/she has mastered and accept new and more challenging experiences. This can be difficult for a protege because this means giving up the known for the unknown. With each new assigned task, a protege may ask, "can I really do this?"

Task changes are never easy for a protege. One protege remarks about a new assignment, "I felt like the ground was pulled from underneath me ..."

A protege must realize that, to grow professionally, it is necessary to assess oneself, to acquire needed skills, to develop new skills, and to make contact with other USDA employees. A protege must be willing to take chances! In fact, a mentor should encourage risk taking.



### **Positive Attitude**

This is the most important trait for a protege to possess because it is a bright and hopeful attitude that can help a protege succeed. A protege with a poor or "defeatist" attitude will not move ahead--the first "bump in the road" will jar this person off course.

## **MENTOR AND PROTEGE CHARACTERISTICS**

---

An optimistic protege is more likely to tackle difficulties and to stay on course. A protege should not be afraid to fail. One mentor comments on her protege's attitude, "Her tremendous spirit was inspiring ...this was serious work to her and she put a great deal of energy into it."

Remember, these characteristics are desired characteristics of the "ideal" protege. If your protege has only two or three of these characteristics, this does not mean that the mentoring relationship will fail. It may, however, take extra effort to overcome possible obstacles that could arise from lacking one or several of these characteristics. For more information on how to overcome mentoring obstacles, see the section "Obstacles in a Mentoring Relationship."

## **PROTEGE'S ROLE**

---

### **Various Roles of a Protege**

Mentoring creates a partnership between two individuals--the mentor and the protege. In the previous section you learned the roles of the mentor, but a mentor is not the only one that must "wear many hats." A protege must also perform several roles.

A protege is the "gauge" to measure how interactive a mentoring partnership will be. This means that the protege determines the capacity of the mentoring relationship. Your protege decides upon the amount of dependence and guidance he/she needs. A protege should take the initiative to ask for help or advice and to tackle more challenging work.

The protege is the "student" who needs to absorb the mentor's knowledge and have the ambition to know what to do with this knowledge. As a student, the protege needs to practice and demonstrate what has been learned. As one mentor describes, "A protege should be able to interpret the regulations, not just spout the regulations."

A protege is also a "trainee" who should blend mentoring with other training approaches. The protege must participate in agency/Departmental training programs, in addition to seeking your professional advice. By participating in other programs, the protege becomes a more well-rounded and versatile USDA employee.

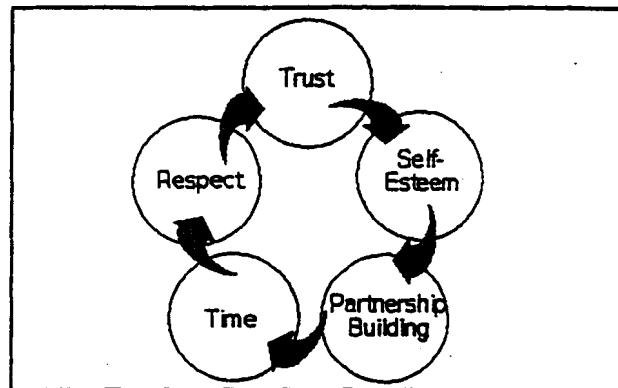
## ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

---

### Five Essentials of a Mentoring Relationship

When you are traveling to an unfamiliar destination, there are probably some essentials you should take to make your trip a success--a road map, directions, and perhaps a contact's telephone number in case you get lost.

Well, as you begin your mentoring journey, there are several essentials that you should know to make your journey a success. These essential factors are:



The first essential of a successful mentoring relationship is respect. Respect is established when the protege recognizes knowledge, skills, and abilities in the mentor that he/she would like to possess. The protege then attempts to acquire these much-admired characteristics. Respect usually increases over time. One mentor asserts that, "Respect accrues over the course of the mentoring relationship."

Trust is another essential of a successful mentoring relationship. Trust is a two-way street--both mentors and proteges need to work together to build trust. There are four factors to building trust:

Communication -> Availability -> Predictability -> Loyalty = Trust

- Communication:** You need to talk and actively listen to your protege. It is important to value your protege's opinions and let your protege know that he/she is being taken seriously. Your protege can help to build trust in the relationship by honestly relaying his/her goals and concerns and by listening to your opinions.

## **ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

- Availability:** You should be willing to meet with your protege whenever he/she needs you. Remember the "open door" policy—that is, you should keep the door open as often as possible. Your protege also needs to make time for this relationship.
  
- Predictability:** Your protege needs you to be dependable and reliable. You should make a point to give consistent feedback, direction, and advice. You should also be able to predict the needs of your protege. Conversely, your protege needs to be consistent in his/her actions and behavior. Although your protege will grow and change during the mentoring relationship, drastic changes in behavior or attitude could signal a problem. Look for these indicators of potential trouble in your mentoring relationship:
  - Frequent switches in directions
  - Frequent arguments
  - Frustration at lack of progress
  - Excessive questioning of each decision or action taken
  - Floundering
  
- Loyalty:** Never compromise your relationship by discussing your protege's problems or concerns with others. In addition, instruct your protege to not discuss your relationship with others. Keep the information discussed between the two of you in strict confidence.

Avoid criticizing or complaining about your agency/Department. Disloyalty to the organization may cause confusion on the part of your protege.

The third essential is "partnership-building" activities. When you enter into a mentoring relationship, you and your protege become professional partners. There are natural barriers that all partnerships face. Natural barriers may include miscommunication or uncertainty of each other's expectations.

## **ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

Five improvement activities can help you overcome these barriers:

1. Maintain communication
2. Fix "obvious" problems
3. Forecast how decisions could affect goals
4. Discuss progress
5. Monitor changes

You and your protege can use the following activities to help build a successful partnership.

- **Show enthusiasm:** Create a positive atmosphere by showing enthusiasm and excitement for your protege's efforts.
- **Create an atmosphere for emotional acceptance:** Since a person can resist being changed, transformation is a campaign for the heart as well as the mind. Help your protege feel accepted as he/she experiences professional growth.
- **Approach change slowly:** Listen to your protege and be responsive to his/her concerns. When drastic changes occur, a person needs time to accept and experiment with these changes.

Partnership-building activities are not only useful when building a mentoring partnership, but also are helpful to your protege when interacting with others.

The fourth essential to a successful mentoring relationship is to build your protege's self-esteem. Everyone has the desire to believe that they are worthwhile and valuable. There are several steps you can take to building your protege's self-esteem.

Encourage your protege to have realistic expectations of:

- Him/herself
- The mentoring relationship
- The position

Dissatisfaction can result if the protege expects too much of him/herself, the mentoring relationship, or the position. Discuss realistic expectations together.

## **ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

Encourage your protege to have a realistic self-perception. You can help define your protege's self-perception by identifying your protege's:

- Social traits
- Intellectual capacity
- Beliefs
- Talents
- Roles

One protege comments, "My mentor perceived talents in me that I had not recognized. She helped me to develop these talents by encouraging and supporting me."

**TIP:** Always provide honest feedback. Your protege deserves the truth, and honest feedback helps your protege keep a realistic self-perception.

Encourage your protege to change a poor self-perception. Changing a poor self-perception requires a good deal of commitment from your protege. There are two reasons for a poor self-perception:

1. The protege "can't" be the person he/she would like to be.
2. The protege "won't" be the person he/she would like to be.

A protege "can't" change when he/she does not have the skills or abilities to change. You can help your protege change this self-perception by helping him/her develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to become the person he/she wants to be.

Often, a protege with a poor self-perception claims he/she "won't" be the person he/she would like to because he/she is not willing to do what is required. You need to instill in your protege that a poor self-perception can be changed if he/she is willing to make the effort.

## **ESSENTIALS OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

**TIP:** Self-esteem building is an important part of your job as a mentor. The most effective way to build your protege's self-esteem is to listen and give positive feedback.

The fifth essential is **time**. During the mentoring relationship, you need to make time to interact with your protege. You need to specifically set aside time for your protege. Try not to let routine tasks exclude your protege. Here are some ways to make time:

- Set meeting times with your protege and don't change these times unless absolutely necessary.
- Meet periodically, at mutually convenient times and at times when you know you won't be interrupted.
- Take a minimum of ten minutes a day to check in with your protege.

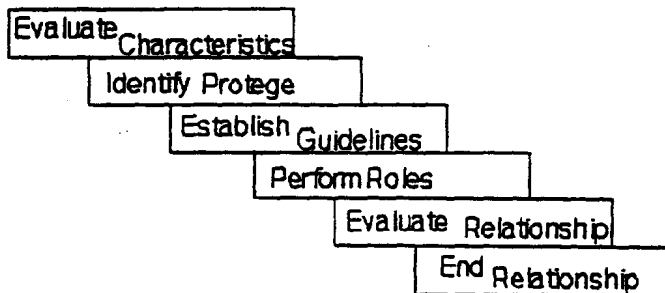
In addition to making time in your schedule, realize that you need to give your protege adequate time to grow professionally.



## MENTORING PROCESS

---

### A Six-Step Mentoring Process



### EVALUATE CHARACTERISTICS

There are several steps to the mentoring process. The first step is to evaluate the characteristics of a mentor. You need to do a self-evaluation. You can evaluate yourself by using the checklist below. This checklist should give you an idea of whether or not you have the characteristics to be a mentor.

Check <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the characteristics that apply to you.	
<input type="checkbox"/> People Oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Good Motivator
<input type="checkbox"/> Effective Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Secure in Position
<input type="checkbox"/> An Achiever	<input type="checkbox"/> Able to give Protege Visibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Values USDA and work	<input type="checkbox"/> Respects Others
Mentor Characteristics Checklist	

You need to remember that these characteristics are found in successful mentors, but they are not all required. You may have identified some characteristics you need to cultivate or improve. Perhaps you may have even found that you are not ready to be a mentor right now.

## MENTORING PROCESS

---

### IDENTIFY PROTEGE

The second step is to identify a protege. You may already have a quasi-mentoring relationship with a junior colleague but have not considered the relationship as one of "mentor" and "protege." Or you may want to be a mentor but don't know how to identify a protege. If you don't have a protege identified, consider these questions:

- Who do I believe has potential to be an outstanding employee and would benefit from my expertise?
- With whom would I feel comfortable building this kind of relationship?
- Who needs my help?

In theory, it is recommended that your protege not be someone you supervise. In practice, however, mentoring relationships often result from supervisor-subordinate relationships. In these types of relationships, you need to remember to keep the mentoring relationship separate from the supervisor-subordinate relationship. You must build a trusting relationship and this involves being able to talk freely to each other. If you are your protege's supervisor, you need to avoid passing judgment and remember to separate the roles of supervisor and mentor.

When you are identifying a protege, you need to remember that the person doesn't need to be exactly like you. Successful mentoring relationships often occur between people of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, and physical capabilities. Think of the employees you know. You want to find a person who possesses at least some of the traits as described in the checklist below.

Check <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the characteristics that apply to your protege candidate.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Eagerness to Learn	<input type="checkbox"/> Able to Work as Team Player
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk Taker
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive Attitude	
Protege Characteristics Checklist	

## **MENTORING PROCESS**

---

### **ESTABLISH GUIDELINES**

Once you have identified your protege, the **third step** is to develop mentoring guidelines. Talk to your protege about expectations that help build the foundation of the mentoring experience. Communicate your expectations to your protege. Ask your protege about his/her expectations. Find out what he/she expects to learn from this relationship and how the relationship should develop. Begin by asking your protege:

- What do you want to gain from this mentoring relationship?
- How should we work together to make the most of this mentoring experience?
- What do you expect from your position/title?
- Where do you want your career to go?

During this step of the mentoring process, you should develop a daily or weekly schedule with your protege to ensure enough time will be devoted to the mentoring relationship.

### **PERFORM ROLES**

The **fourth step** is to perform the appropriate roles. Talk to your protege about the different roles of a mentor and protege. Your protege may not be aware of the roles he/she is expected to perform. During this step of the mentoring process, you and your protege begin to assume your roles.

### **EVALUATE RELATIONSHIP**

The **fifth step** is to informally evaluate your mentoring relationship. Meet with your protege, from time to time, to find out if expectations are being met and if both you and your protege are satisfied.

When you evaluate your mentoring relationship, you may find that there are issues or obstacles you need to discuss. The mentor, as the senior and more experienced partner, should take the initiative for monitoring the "health" of the mentoring relationship. Your protege is responsible for acknowledging and discussing problems as they arise.

## **MENTORING PROCESS**

---

### **END RELATIONSHIP**

Finally, the sixth step of the mentoring process involves knowing when to end the mentoring relationship. It is healthy for a mentoring relationship to end. One protege shares, "I felt that I had grown up and was ready to let go of my mentor. I was ready to follow my own direction."

The following are three common reasons why mentoring relationships end:

- **Protege "grows" beyond the boundaries of the relationship**  
When a protege begins to gain more confidence and starts to perform more independently, the mentoring relationship may begin to wane. This is acceptable. You want your protege to achieve independence and begin to make decisions on his/her own. Of course, you and your protege can still remain good friends and continue professional contact.
- **Protege and mentor have a "falling out"**  
You may also find that the mentoring relationship is no longer beneficial to you or your protege. Sometimes the mentoring relationship becomes exploitative and needs to be terminated. When a mentoring relationship ends, reflection and analysis need to be employed to discover why.

Both the mentor and the protege should think carefully about whether their expectations were realistic and if their behaviors were appropriate. This reflection is beneficial if the mentor and protege begin a new mentoring relationship with another individual.

- **Mentor or Protege leaves position or USDA**  
Of course, a mentoring relationship can also end when one partner vacates the position or leaves USDA. However, the role of advisor, counselor, teacher, or the other roles may still continue.

## MENTORING SKILLS

---

### Skill Building

Skills such as listening, counseling, and career advising are crucial skills for a mentor. Read this section to learn more about these basic mentoring skills.

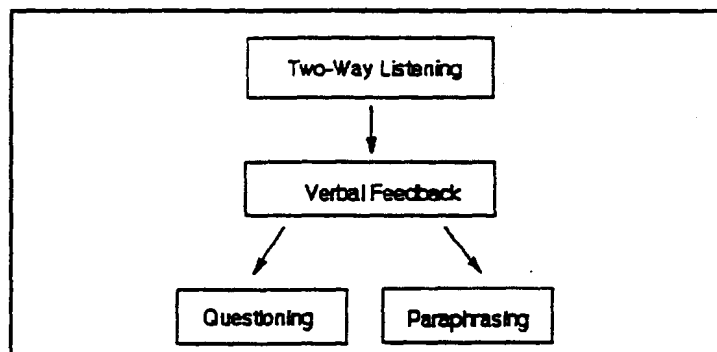
### Listening Skills

There are two styles of listening—one-way listening and two-way listening. **One-way listening**, also known as passive listening, occurs when a listener tries to understand the speaker's remarks without actively trying to provide feedback. This listener may deliberately, or unintentionally, send non-verbal messages such as eye contact, smiles, yawns, or nods. However, there is no verbal response to indicate how the message is being received.

Sometimes one-way listening is an appropriate way to listen. If your protege wants to "air a gripe," vent frustration, or express an opinion, you may want to practice one-way listening. Your protege may not want or need a verbal response, rather he/she may only want you to serve as a "sounding board."

One-way listening is also appropriate when you want to ease back mentally and be entertained. It would be a mistake to interrupt your protege as he/she relates a good joke or story.

**Two-way listening** involves verbal feedback. There are two types of feedback that you can use as a listener.



One type of verbal feedback involves a questioning response. You ask for additional information to clarify your idea of the protege's message. For instance,

## **MENTORING SKILLS**

---

you may want to ask, "What do you mean?" By asking this type of question, you are asking your protege to elaborate on information already given.

The second type of verbal feedback is **paraphrasing** in this type of feedback, you need to demonstrate that you have understood your protege's concerns. You need to rephrase your protege's ideas in your own words. If you concentrate on restating your protege's words, you can avoid selective listening which is responding only to parts of the conversation that interest you.

**TIP:** You can summarize your protege's points by saying, "Let me make sure I'm with you so far," or "The way you see the problem is ..."

A key to strengthening your listening skills is to improve your concentration. You can improve concentration by:

- **Holding your fire:** Learn not to get too excited or angry about the individual's point until you are sure you understand it. Do not immediately draw any conclusions whether the meaning is "good" or "bad." Reduce your emotional reactions.
- **Listening for the main point:** When listening to your protege, focus on the main ideas. Make a mental outline of his/her most important points. Look at your protege to understand what is being communicated.
- **Resisting distractions:** While listening to your protege, try to ignore your surroundings, e.g., outside noises or others. Try to concentrate on your protege's facial expressions, or his/her emphasis on certain words.
- **Capitalizing upon thought speed:** On an average, you speak 125 words a minute. You think, and therefore listen, at almost four times the speed. You need to remember not to let your mind stray while you are waiting for the person's next thought. Instead, try to "listen between the lines." You can do this by interpreting your protege's non-verbal messages.

## MENTORING SKILLS

---

- **Listening for the whole meaning:** Listen for feeling as well as fact. In other words, try to "get inside the other person's head."

### Counseling

During the course of the mentoring relationship, you may be required to counsel your protege on problems that can stem from conditions outside of work, or from conflicts at work. You may also counsel your protege on how to make certain decisions.

As a mentor, you should be familiar with the **non-directive approach** to counseling. The focus of this approach is to let your protege discover problems and work out solutions that best fit his/her value system. This type of approach avoids the need for making a diagnosis.

**TIP:** One role you don't want to assume is that of a psychoanalyst. Never try to diagnose a protege's problem.

A non-directive counseling approach requires you to use active listening skills. One mentor explains that, "By carefully listening to your protege's concerns, you are better able to help your protege ..." While listening to your protege, refrain from passing judgment. You should accept the different values and opinions of your protege without imposing your own values and opinions.

Make your protege feel comfortable and at ease and show a genuine interest in your protege's welfare. Attempt to get your protege to "open up" with phrases such as:

- "I see, would you like to tell me about it?"
- "Would you help me to better understand your feelings?"
- "Why do you feel that way?"
- "OK ...what happened?"

As part of the non-directive approach, you should learn how to reflect upon what has been said by your protege. A non-directive approach does NOT mean that you are passive throughout the discussion. Any discussion, if it is to be

## **MENTORING SKILLS**

---

productive, requires a give-and-take style. You should reflect on your protege's statements by restating the key point(s). Make sure you really know what your protege is trying to tell you.

It is not unusual for a person to stop talking during a conversation to organize thoughts, focus opinions, interpret feelings, or simply catch his/her breath. You may feel great pressure to break the silence by saying something. However, it is better to let your protege restart the conversation and continue the conversation at his/her own pace. This eliminates putting too much of your own feelings and biases into the conversation.

**TIP:** Don't try to anticipate your protege's feelings or thoughts. This can lead the conversation off in the wrong direction. Let your protege voice his/her own feelings and thoughts.

If your protege becomes emotional during your discussion, let him/her work through the feelings. After an emotional release, it is not unusual for a person to feel shame or guilt. If your protege wants to discuss this emotional release, you should allow him/her to talk freely about it.

With a non-directive approach, it is better to let your protege arrive at his/her own solutions. (This helps your protege sharpen problem-solving abilities.) Of course you can give advice to your protege, but you need to emphasize that this advice comes from your own perspective or experience. If you are asking for advice, preface your statements with, "From my experience ...," or "The way I view the situation ...," or "If I were in your situation, I would consider ..." These statements help your protege understand that this advice is from your perspective. It is the protege's choice and responsibility to decide whether or not to apply it.

Remember the more serious and personal your protege's problem, the more cautious you should be about giving advice.



## MENTORING SKILLS

---

**TIP:** You can refer your protege to USDA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you feel the problem is too serious or personal.

It goes without saying that confidences should be maintained. You should use considerable discretion in handling sensitive or confidential information. Realize that your protege may be feeling anxiety, apprehension, or fear about disclosing this information to you. Your protege may wonder how this information is going to be interpreted or acted upon. (This is where trust really is a factor.)

When you counsel your protege, you can learn to better understand how your protege thinks, feels, acts, or reacts. In fact, counseling can effectively stimulate your protege's problem-solving ability.

### Career Advising

Mentoring requires you to help your protege set career goals and to meet these career goals within a specified time frame.



First, you need to determine your protege's interests. To help your protege determine his/her interests, begin by asking questions such as:

- What activities do you enjoy or find satisfying in your work?
- What did you like best about your last (or present) job?
- What are outside activities or organizations you enjoy?
- What are volunteer programs in which you are active?

Keep in mind that your protege may have difficulty identifying his/her own skills and abilities for three reasons:

1. People tend to be modest and not want to "toot their own horn."
2. People tend to recall only those skills necessary for the current

## MENTORING SKILLS

---

job and discount skills learned in previous jobs or non-work experiences.

3. People tend to diminish their skills by thinking the skills are common to everyone.



Once your protege shares some of his/her interests, begin to categorize these interests. You can organize the interests into four key areas:

1. People interests--helping, serving, caring for, selling, working with others.
2. Creative interests--writing, designing, developing, planning.
3. Labor interests--working with machines, tools, living things.
4. Research interests--collecting and analyzing data, facts, records.

By categorizing your protege's interests into any of these key areas, you can help your protege focus on the types of tasks (or jobs) that he/she enjoys.

Once you have identified your protege's interests, you need to identify his/her knowledge, skills, and abilities within these interest areas. You need to gather this information to focus your protege's goals and his/her area of interest. Ask your protege:

- What are your work responsibilities?
- What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you need to meet these responsibilities?
- What do you believe are your strengths?

**TIP:** Your protege may wish to consider learning more about his/her interests, skills, abilities, and preferred lifestyles by completing a self-assessment instrument.

## **MENTORING SKILLS**

---

Often knowledge, skills, and abilities are displayed in accomplishments. Accomplishments include the successful completion of any work-related assignment or task that clearly demonstrates a particular skill or combination of skills. Ask your protege to think about his/her professional or personal accomplishments. Ask your protege the following questions:

- What would you consider to be your three most significant accomplishments?
- Why do you consider these to be the most significant?

You can help your protege reveal knowledge, skills, and abilities by forcing him/her to closely examine professional or personal accomplishments.



Once you have determined your protege's interests, knowledge, skills, and abilities, you then need to help your protege develop or isolate developmental goals. Developmental goals are the desires to enhance one's career, social interaction, and personal endeavors.

Developmental goals are difficult to identify because they are more abstract than tasks. To identify developmental goals, start with a long-term goal setting plan (no more than three years) and work backwards. You need to work backwards because it's easier to identify short-term goals once you know what the long-term goals are. Ask your protege:

- What would you like to be in three years (long-term goals)?
- What series of one-year goals (short-term goals) could lead you to these objectives?

You can set a formalized career structure for your protege by writing the long-term and short-term goals on a planning worksheet.

Keep in mind that your protege's career goals must be realistic and flexible. You also should ensure that the protege's career goals coincide with USDA's philosophy and culture.

Once you have identified the developmental goals, organize these goals under one of the following categories:

## MENTORING SKILLS

---

- Career Goals
- Target Areas
- Social Goals
- Personal Goals

**Career goals** are desires to advance one's profession. To attain career goals, one must use his/her knowledge, skills, and abilities. For example, an Industry Economist wanted to be recognized as a "senior" Economist. To accomplish this career goal, he determined that he first needed to concentrate on publishing economic articles in professional journals to enhance his writing skills and promote peer recognition.

**Target areas** are subtasks that a protege needs to do to reach his/her career goals. For example, a Secretary has a long-term career goal to be an Administrative Officer. She identifies three different target areas to accomplish this goal. Her target areas are to improve (1) writing skills, (2) analytical skills, and (3) personnel, budget, and procurement knowledges.

**Social goals** are aspirations to meet other professionals to build a network of contacts. For instance, one protege joined a professional organization to meet people in his field.

**Personal goals** are strong desires to improve oneself. One protege wanted to concentrate on improving her organizational skills so she could perform her job more effectively. She decided to attend a time management course to reach her goal.



Once your protege's career goals are established, you need to meet at least every six months to evaluate them. You and your protege may want to adjust developmental goals as your protege's interests change, or changes occur within USDA.

**TIP:** One way to set goals is through an Individual Development or Training Plan which is a written plan designed to meet particular career development goals.

## **TYPES OF MENTORING**

---

### **Three Types of Mentoring**

There are three different routes one can take on the road to successful mentoring. The three routes to mentoring are:

- **Traditional Mentoring**
- **Planned Mentoring**
- **Self-Mentoring**

Although these routes will lead you to the same destination, you need to decide which route to follow.

### **Traditional Mentoring**

Traditional mentoring also referred to as informal mentoring, focuses primarily on the protege's career path through goal setting. The mentor and protege work together to devise an action plan that sets career goals that will lead the protege on the appropriate career path. Traditional mentoring not only encourages the protege to establish career goals but also advocates personal goals. The overall development of the individual is the focus of traditional mentoring.

Traditional mentoring is a natural process; that is, the mentor and protege pair together by their own internal forces. Internal forces are the ingredients that create the relationship. One protege remarks, "My mentor and I have a lot in common. We enjoy discussing different subjects, ranging from sports to the latest news on the stock market." With this type of mentoring, you can say a mentor and protege come together through a "special chemistry." Generally, traditional mentoring lasts between 8-15 years, (although friendships that are formed through this type of mentoring can last a lifetime).

Another characteristic of traditional mentoring is that it involves frequent social interaction between the mentor and protege. This type of mentoring relationship usually results in the mentor and protege spending time outside of the office and sharing a friendly, comfortable relationship. This type of mentoring is usually successful because the two parties have a genuine concern for each other's well-being. Friendship, rather than job requirements, keeps the two parties together.

## **TYPES OF MENTORING**

---

### **Planned Mentoring**

**Planned Mentoring**, also known as formal mentoring, primarily focuses on the goals of the organization. Organizational goals are ones that:

- Increase productivity
- Eliminate turnover
- Reduces absenteeism

Planned mentoring primarily concentrates on the needs of the organization. This usually results in benefits to both the organization and the protege.

This type of mentoring promotes a "formal business" approach to the relationship so there is little or no social interaction. The mentor and protege rarely see each other outside of the office. The mentor and protege are not concerned with developing a friendship as much as they are interested in meeting the organization's needs. After all, the basis of the relationship is organizational commitment.

Planned mentoring usually lasts from six to eight months. The relationship ends when the organizational goals are reached. This type of mentoring takes a systematic approach that consists of five steps:

1. **Match participants:** The proteges are matched by the organization to "suitable" mentors. These matches are based on similar attitudes and work assignments.
2. **Write a formal contract:** The mentor and protege develop a formal contract that outlines expectations and obligations. Both participants sign the contract to bind the relationship.
3. **Train participants:** The organization trains the participants to understand their roles of mentor or protege.
4. **Monitor the relationship:** The mentor and protege monitor the mentoring program to ensure the compliance of the formal contract.
5. **Evaluate the program:** The program is evaluated to determine the results, such as advantages, cost effectiveness, and difficulties.

## TYPES OF MENTORING

---

**NOTE:** Some mentoring relationships develop into a combination of both planned and traditional.

### Self-Mentoring

Although self-mentoring can be considered a type of mentoring, it does in fact differ significantly from the other two mentoring types. Why? Because self-mentoring is more of a strategy than a type. There is no mentor that promotes the development of a protege. Rather, it is the individual who cultivates his/her own professional growth through self-tutoring activities and resource-finding techniques. Self-mentoring requires the individual to be highly motivated and self-disciplined.

The individual prefers to increase job effectiveness and augment professional talents through building a body of knowledge and skills without the aid of other people.

There are several self-mentoring strategies that successful individuals have used. Here are five strategies that individuals have used to help advance their professional growth:

1. **Ask questions and listen carefully to the experts in your field of interest.** This includes finding out who is the authority on a subject and asking detailed questions. Talk to people who are in positions to which the individual wishes to aspire.
2. **Read and research materials in the field.** Learn new information from trade magazines, books, and periodicals.
3. **Observe people in leadership positions.** Individuals can learn a lot about the inner workings of USDA and different leadership styles simply by watching those in authority.
4. **Attend educational programs.** Educational programs may include conferences, seminars, night classes, or USDA training courses.
5. **Seek out new opportunities.** Volunteer for projects, or join professional organizations.

You may want to alert your protege to these strategies. A protege should be encouraged to look for opportunities to develop independently, outside of the traditional mentoring arena.

## **MENTORING STAGES**

---

### **The Four Stages of Mentoring**

Mentoring, as a dynamic and ever-changing process, consists of different stages that provide a protege with the opportunity to learn and grow. A mentor needs to be aware that each stage requires that different roles be assumed.

There are four stages of mentoring:

- Prescriptive
- Persuasive
- Collaborative
- Confirmative

In the first stage of mentoring, the **Prescriptive Stage**, the protege usually has little or no experience at USDA or in the workplace. This stage is most comfortable for the novice protege, who depends heavily on you for support and direction. This is where you are prescribing, ordering, and advising your protege.

During this stage, you need to primarily assume the roles of:

- Teacher
- Guide
- Counselor
- Motivator
- Coach
- Role Model

Note: These roles are not exclusive to this stage. The purpose of this list is to serve as a guideline for your actions during this stage.

The **Prescriptive Stage** requires you to give a lot of praise and attention to build your protege's self-confidence. You will devote more time to your protege in this stage than in any of the other stages. You need to focus on providing detailed guidance and advice to your protege on many, if not all, workplace issues and procedures. In this stage, think of the protege as a "sponge"--soaking up every new piece of information you provide. You will share many of your experiences, "trials," and "anecdotes" during this stage.



## **MENTORING STAGES**

---

**For Example:** A protege, fresh from school, was unsure of what was expected of him in the job. His mentor gave him advice and told him how she was integrated into the Department when she first joined the organization. By sharing her stories and offering support, the mentor was able to provide a more comfortable workplace transition for her protege.

**TIP:** Give examples of how you or other people handled similar situations and what consequences resulted.

The **Persuasive Stage**, the second stage, requires you to take a strong approach with your protege. In this stage, you need to actually persuade your protege to find answers and seek challenges. The protege usually has some experience, but needs firm direction to be successful.

During this stage, your protege needs to be prodded into taking risks. Suggest new strategies, coach, question, and push your protege into discoveries.

Generally, the roles you assume during this stage are:

- Teacher
- Guide
- Counselor
- Motivator
- Coach
- Advisor
- Referral Agent
- Role Model

**For Example:** A Security Specialist protege, with two years of experience, faced a problem that could ruin her professional reputation in the division if she made the wrong decision. She turned to her mentor who offered different suggestions to give the protege a new perspective on the situation. The protege was able to make a better decision once she knew all the alternatives and was able to keep her good reputation within the division.

## **MENTORING STAGES**

---

**TIP:** Influence actions by asking questions challenging you protege.

In the **Collaborative Stage**, the protege has enough experience and ability that he/she can work together with the mentor to jointly solve problems and participate in "more equal" communication. In this stage, the protege actively cooperates with the mentor in his/her professional development.

**For Example:** A Procurement Analyst protege had four years of government experience but was unfamiliar with the policy and procedures of his new office. While he had made several good contacts in the other agency, he relied on his mentor to introduce him to the key procurement dynamics and the challenging projects that the different groups were undertaking in his new office. He and his mentor discussed policy and procedures and jointly decided how he could make a smoother transition into the organization.

In this stage, you may allow your protege, at times, to take control by giving him/her a chance to work independently. For instance, a protege can be given a piece of an important project to do on his/her own, with little or no guidance from the mentor.

**TIP:** Alternate leadership roles to give your protege more experience with working independently.

The **Confirmative Stage** is suitable for proteges with a lot of experience who have mastered the job requirements, but require your insight into USDA policies and people. In this stage, you act more as a sounding board or empathetic listener. One mentor asserts, "My protege presents career questions to me. I give her my advice and encouragement in a non-judgmental manner about her career decisions."

## MENTORING STAGES

---

Generally, the roles you assume during the Confirmative Stage are:

- Counselor
- Coach
- Advisor
- Sponsor
- Door Opener
- Role Model

**TIP:** Assign your protege independent work projects.

While everyone can benefit from a mentor at any point in his/her career, the ultimate goal of the mentoring stages is to produce a well-rounded, competent employee who outgrows the tutelage of a mentor. Your relationship should evolve to the point where your protege is self-motivated, confident, and polished.

Ideally, you want your protege to move on to become a mentor to another colleague.

Each mentoring stage is characterized by the degree of dependence your protege has on you as a mentor. The degree of protege dependency is greatest at the Prescriptive Stage, with dependency decreasing with each subsequent stage. This means that a protege who is successfully capable of working independently most of the time would be comfortable in the Confirmative Stage. As the protege grows professionally, the amount of dependence decreases, until the protege is shaped into an independent and competent employee.



## PROTEGE DEPENDENCY

You and your protege can begin your mentoring relationship at any of the four stages. The stage of your relationship is determined by the amount of experience your protege has and how much guidance he/she needs. To determine

## **MENTORING STAGES**

---

your protege's level of experience, you need to analyze the mentoring relationship. You need to decide:

- What are your protege's knowledge, skills, and abilities?
- What is your protege's level of experience?
- What amount of guidance does your protege require?

To answer these questions, observe your protege at work and watch how your protege interacts with others. The answers to these questions can help you decide in which stage your mentoring relationship should begin.

**For Example:** Sally, Director of Strategic Planning, evaluated her protege as a well-seasoned employee who had a fair amount of contacts in the field and who had extensive knowledge of her position. Sally adapted her mentoring style to fit the characteristics of the Collaborative Stage.

Once you have determined how much guidance and support your protege needs, you can decide which mentoring stage is appropriate for your relationship and which role(s) to assume.

Mentoring relationships may follow all four stages, or only several of these stages. In fact, there is such a fine line between each stage that frequently it is difficult to tell when one stage ends and another begins. Your protege should give you verbal and non-verbal signs to indicate when he/she is ready to move to the next mentoring stage.

You need to continually evaluate your mentoring relationship as it evolves. Determine when it is time to alter your mentoring style. Keep in mind that your relationship will stagnate if your mentoring style remains in a stage your protege has outgrown.

## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

### **Overcoming Obstacles in the Relationship**

During the course of your mentoring relationship, you and your protege may experience "roadblocks." Roadblocks are obstacles that could hinder a developing relationship. There are obstacles unique to a mentor and obstacles that only a protege may encounter.

The obstacles that could confront a mentor are:

- A mentoring style that does not meet the protege's needs or suit you.
- Insufficient time.
- A protege's supervisor feeling excluded.
- A protege who has a hidden agenda.
- An inappropriate attitude on the part of the protege.

### **MENTOR**

What happens when ...

... a highly-organized mentor has a protege with a relaxed work style?

... a creative protege has a mentor who practices the "old school of thought?"

... an assertive mentor has a protege with a reserved personality?

Of course you can guess what would happen ...frustration!

As a mentor, your style of mentoring may not always match the needs of your protege. Your mentoring style has a lot to do with who you are and how you work. If you are a detail-oriented person, you probably tend to give extensive directions or outline each step of an assignment. If you are a person who tends to see the "big picture," you probably are more inclined to give looser, perhaps even vague directions to your protege. Of course, noting these differences does not make one style better than the other. However, differences in styles between you and your protege can pose as an obstacle.

## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

A Contract Specialist protege comments, "My mentor had a 'laissez-faire' work style which frustrated me. She would assign me a task, but she wouldn't offer any suggestions and very little details on how to complete it. I felt lost and needed more direction." Both of you need to understand each other's styles. Be flexible, but remember that disorganization and sloppiness warrant improvement rather than acceptance.

Frustration may also occur when you don't adapt your style to meet the developing needs of your protege. As your relationship evolves, your protege's confidence grows as skills develop and successes are relished.

You need to adjust your mentoring techniques to keep in sync with your protege's evolution. In time, detailed directions or certain problem-solving strategies may be considered stifling by your developing protege. Consider giving less and accepting more from your protege. To meet the needs of your protege, you need to periodically evaluate your protege by considering:

- Knowledge, skills, abilities, and traits of your protege.
- The level of your protege.
- The needs of your protege.

Once you evaluate your protege and discover the required amount of guidance, you can determine what style is appropriate for your protege.

**TIP:** Take verbal and non-verbal cues from your protege to determine your mentoring style.

**For Example:** When a protege began to offer valid suggestions and appropriate solutions to more complex problems, her mentor realized that she should offer more freedom and flexibility to her protege's problem-solving attempts.

Another potential obstacle is insufficient time. Some mentors can't seem to devote enough time to their protege. Other commitments in your schedule may prevent you from spending time with your protege. If you start to sacrifice time with your protege because of other commitments, he/she may lose faith in you and your mentoring relationship will suffer.

## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

Another obstacle involving time occurs when a mentor expects too much progress from the protege, in an unrealistic amount of time. You need to give your protege time to grow professionally and to make mistakes along the way. Try not to be impatient with your protege and expect too much too soon.

Unless you are your protege's supervisor, you may find that your protege's supervisor feels excluded from the mentoring relationship. It is imperative that you do not undermine the authority of your protege's supervisor.

**TIP:** Keep the supervisor updated by discussing your protege's achievements, progress, goals, and action plan.

Another possible obstacle is a protege who has a hidden agenda. A hidden agenda is an ulterior motive for forming the relationship. For instance, some proteges seek out high-level, respected mentors with the misguided intent of only furthering their own careers, thus overlooking the significant other benefits of mentoring. Hidden agendas are harmful to the mentoring relationship because the relationship is built on deceit.

**TIP:** Be honest about motives and keep the lines of communication open.

If you think your protege has a "hidden agenda," you may want to discuss the issue tactfully. Remember never directly accuse your protege. Question your protege, but don't push the issue.

Another possible obstacle involves a protege's inappropriate attitude toward the mentoring relationship. Some proteges expect too much from the mentors--demanding more time and attention than they actually need.

## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

**TIP:** Periodically discuss your expectations with each other.

Others may expect to control their mentors. Be firm with your protege about commitments and responsibilities. If you give your protege an assignment or deadline, don't accept excuses for poor work or missed deadlines (unless the excuses are beyond the protege's control).

In terms of social etiquette, you must be supportive of your protege and sensitive to cultural differences. For example, in some cultures, there is a preference towards modesty, reserve and control. Whereas with another culture, directness or emotionally intense, dynamic, and demonstrative behavior is considered appropriate.

The mentor is not the only one in the partnership that may have to confront an obstacle. Obstacles may arise for the protege too. A protege may confront obstacles such as:

- Peer jealousy.
- Being accused of "holding on to the coat tails of another."
- One party overstepping professional boundaries.
- The mentor falling from favor.

### **PROTEGE**

One problem for a protege is the jealousy of peers who do not have a mentor. When others see a protege getting key assignments and advancing rapidly, professional jealousy can occur.

**TIP:** Suggest to your protege to act as an advisor to those who are jealous.

By showing your protege how to act as an advisor, he/she can gain leadership experience and perhaps diffuse some of the jealousy. If this does not



## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

work, advise your protege to look at this as another opportunity for learning and to use his/her interpersonal skills to deal with the situation.

Another obstacle that your protege may encounter is the attitude of others who believe that he/she got to be a protege by practicing the "holding on to the coat tails of another" theory. This theory suggests that your protege is not earning respect and advancing by his/her own merit but through his/her association with you.

**TIP: Give your protege visibility and let others see his/her competence and abilities.**

You need to allow the capability of your protege to show for itself. Encourage your protege not to add "fuel to the fire" by divulging information about your relationship.

**For Example:** A Research Analyst, who began her career as a Secretary, said that others accused her of "quickly moving up through the ranks" because of her mentoring relationship with a successful and powerful executive. This protege, still under her mentor's tutelage, has mostly ignored the accusations, but she also admitted that she has put forth extra effort to achieve recognition from her peers for her promotion.

Another problem that both a protege and a mentor could face is when one party oversteps the professional boundaries of the relationship. This occurs when one party wants the relationship to become more "personal." This type of obstacle sometimes occurs in cross-gender mentoring relationships. The fact that mentoring involves a close and confidential relationship between an experienced and less experienced employee could result in this obstacle.

According to a female protege who was mentored by a senior-level male, "My mentor wanted our relationship to be more than professional. I thought it was inappropriate and I decided to end our mentoring relationship."

## **OBSTACLES IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP**

---

**TIP:** Tactfully discuss the issue with your protege to determine if the mentoring relationship should continue.

This obstacle should not deter you from forming a cross-gender mentoring relationship. It only means that people should be sensitive to the perceptions of each other.

Another obstacle a protege might face is a mentor falling from favor and others at USDA looking with disapproval at the mentor. This is an obstacle which calls for careful reflection when professional needs and opportunities have to be balanced against personal loyalty and integrity. If possible, the protege should discuss the "issue of contention" with the mentor. One protege comments, "My mentor had a 'falling out' with his boss and things were pretty uncomfortable for those of us who remained loyal. Everything worked out in the end, but it gave me some insight into my own values."

Once you or your protege evaluate the relationship, you may find yourself in a mentor-protege relationship that cannot be salvaged. Only after all other efforts to remedy the problem have been tried should you consider ending the relationship for adverse reasons.

These are just a few of the obstacles you and your protege may encounter during your relationship, but with time and effort these obstacles can be overcome.

## **BENEFITS OF MENTORING**

---

### **What Are Some Benefits?**

One of the main objectives of this program is to provide career guidance and role models for interns. However, this is only one example of the benefits achieved through mentoring. Mentoring provides benefits to the mentor, protege, and USDA.

An overwhelming number of mentors feel that one of the greatest rewards of being a mentor is the personal satisfaction of fostering the professional growth of proteges. The personal satisfaction that a mentor feels is one benefit to a mentor. As a mentor, you may reap the following rewards:

- An opportunity to pass on your legacy to the newest generation of employees at USDA.  
  
Many USDA mentors will feel pride in knowing that their protege's progress and achievements will extend into the future of USDA.
- A chance to cultivate your management, leadership, and interpersonal skills.  
  
You sharpen these skills by delegating challenging work to your protege and by giving constructive feedback.
- A source of recognition from your peers.  
  
Others will respect the role you have in imparting the values of USDA to your protege.
- The potential for developing rewarding professional contacts by interacting with other mentors, as well as with contacts made through your protege.
- Learning from your protege—mentors and proteges can learn from each other.

For the protege, mentoring provides a number of benefits. One protege expresses, "Mentoring helped me build my confidence. I was inspired to try new ideas and never to be satisfied with less than my best. I was pushed to take challenges and move beyond the usual expectations."

## **BENEFITS OF MENTORING**

---

Here are some other specific ways that a protege can benefit from mentoring:

- The protege is provided a role model and sounding board. By using the mentor as a role model, the protege can learn from example. In addition, the protege can use the mentor as a sounding board to express new ideas or to vent frustrations.
- For the novice protege, mentoring allows for a smoother transition into the workforce. A protege who is fresh from school may join the workforce with unrealistic expectations and naive illusions. As a mentor, you can make this adjustment period easier through communication, understanding, and guidance.
- For the seasoned protege, mentoring helps the protege feel more comfortable with the new environment and allows a quicker adjustment to the USDA culture.
- The protege will have an opportunity to work on challenging and interesting projects. A less experienced protege, under a mentor's tutelage, can be given a chance to try different and more advanced tasks.

Studies have found the employees who engage in a mentoring relationship are more likely to move ahead faster than employees without mentors (Harvard Business Review, "Much Ado About Mentors," 1979, by G.R. Roche). This generally results in proteges having a greater career satisfaction than their peers who do not have mentors.

### **USDA**

Finally, mentoring also benefits USDA. Below are some examples of how USDA can profit from mentoring.

- USDA gains a team of well-rounded employees. Both mentors and proteges have an opportunity to expand their leadership, interpersonal, and technical skills through this relationship.

By allowing proteges to expand their skills, this reduces the chance the employees will be "lost" within their USDA agency or will experience a career plateau.

## **BENEFITS OF MENTORING**

---

- **Mentoring offers an effective way of integrating new employees into the workforce. Because mentors pass on their values, ethics, and standards, this process ensures the future success of USDA.**
  
- **Mentoring is also beneficial when recruiting new employees. This type of program makes the organization more attractive to potential employees because it shows that USDA cares about the well-being of its employees.**
  
- **USDA retains qualified employees. As one mentor comments, "In an age of career mobility, there is a need to hang on to quality individuals." Mentoring helps the protege feel closer and more loyal to USDA. A protege who feels closer to USDA reduces the likelihood that he/she will leave the organization.**