

4 Ways to be a great mentee

(Hint: it's not all about you)

Written by [Deborah Liu](#)

1. Get Help Finding the Right Match

While many mentoring relationships grow organically, you can speed up the process by asking someone you trust to help you find a mentor. They can match you with the right person based on what you are seeking to get out of a mentor and set up the relationship for success.

When I find mentors for people on my team, for example, the first thing I do is learn what they hope to get out of the relationship. Once I understand that, I can suggest mentors who match their interests and goals. For example, one product manager (PM) I work with was looking for a senior woman leader who had taken a similar path, and a designer was looking for someone to broaden their visibility outside of our group. In each case, I asked a leader I trusted if they'd consider being a mentor and helped them kick off their relationship.

Going through a "matchmaker" can also help you gain access to mentors you might otherwise have been unable to reach. In my own case, because of time constraints and how much I invest in these relationships, I can only mentor three to five people a year. I used to be part of a mentoring program that assigned me someone at random to mentor. But I found those relationships to be somewhat unsatisfying for both of us because what I had to offer and what they needed were misaligned. I now take mentees only at the request of someone who knows both of us and knows that I can be of unique support for the mentee.

2. Nurture the Relationship

Often when we're being mentored, we mistake it as a service someone is offering us. We ask for advice, and they give it to us. But mentoring is a relationship, not a transaction. If you treat mentorship as something you only receive, the relationship will quickly fizzle out.

Mentors usually sign up to help you through a problem, or if they go through a program it's for a set amount of time. They invest their own time and effort to support you. Your job is to make sure their investment is worthwhile and that you are both giving back to them and paying it forward to others (more on that below).

As a mentor, it's often hard to know if I'm having a positive impact, especially if I'm not getting any feedback. Having a mentee follow up and let me know they took the advice I gave them—and how it turned out—is really gratifying and makes me more invested in their success and the relationship.

3. Turn a Mentor into a Sponsor

Many people who have mentored me, like my early managers at Facebook, continued to advocate for me long after we met, acting as sponsors for my career. They are why I am where I am today. In turn, I sponsor many people I've mentored throughout my 10 years at Facebook—but not all of them. I look for people with initiative who are worth championing long after our initial relationship is complete.

Every mentor has different criteria—conscious or not—for what makes them decide to invest in a mentee for the long haul. But in general, they're looking for someone who not only shows promise, but is actively working to live up to that promise. These mentees are eager to take on stretch assignments and volunteer to contribute broadly such as running bootcamp training or recruiting. Each time you meet is a chance to demonstrate those traits to your mentor, and proactively show them that you're worthy of sponsorship.

4. Pay It Forward

Don't forget to pass what you've learned along to others—after all, you wouldn't be where you are if your mentor hadn't done the same for you. You can start small: At Facebook, for example, we encourage many new PMs to join mentoring circles to navigate the onboarding process. It's a great opportunity for more tenured Facebook PMs to get hands-on leadership experience guiding new employees through the PM process and setting them up for success at Facebook. Many PMs and other Facebook employees also find mentors through communities called Facebook Resource Groups, which are networks of people who share similar values of supporting and encouraging diversity.

Mentorship is an important relationship from both sides. Yes, the mentor has to put a lot into it—but it's also up to the mentee to be thoughtful about what they put into it and what they want to get out of it. By being a great mentee, you'll not only advance your career, you'll learn the lessons you need to be a great mentor in the future, too.

by Deborah Liu

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