



## Monthly Tips: Preparing for Mentoring and Professional Transitions

### Making Meaning from Mentoring

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Whether your mentoring relationship was highly productive or less than you'd hoped for, mentoring experiences offer the opportunity to learn, grow as professionals and gain insights about ourselves. These questions will help you make meaning from your mentoring experience:

- *What was your role?* Internalizing experience and feedback requires taking time to reflect and make meaning, as well as effort to test and apply new ideas, skills and practices in other settings. So, consider your own role related to the successful and even less successful parts of the mentoring relationship.
- Reflect on your experience and sort out what you've learned.
- Ask yourself, "How might I apply this in the future?" or perhaps "What can I do differently next time to support a more desirable outcome?"
- Discuss major ideas and what you have learned with friends or peers.
- Plan ways to test or apply new knowledge and skills (next steps), possibly in a new context.

### Mentor Relationship Transition: Is it Time to Say Goodbye? <sup>1</sup>

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The formal program will end but that doesn't mean you need to end your mentoring relationship. It is up to you to decide. Review your goals for mentoring together. Decide if you need more time to complete your goals. If you do, discuss what you will do and when you will wrap things up. If you feel comfortable with what you have accomplished together, discuss how you will transition to the next stage of your relationship. Will you stay in touch or will you conclude your meetings and conversations at the end of the program. This conversation will help manage expectations, support closure of your formal relationship and help you transition to the next stage in your relationship.

[Be Intentional about Creating Closure](#) - If you have decided to wrap up your experience, it is important to give some attention to how that is best done. Generally, if you don't plan some kind of celebration or reflection of your experiences, it might not happen. That's natural since endings can be difficult for many reasons. So, our best advice is to be intentional about creating closure. This will help you internalize your mentoring experience and offer your partner a meaningful experience as a lasting memory.

### [Ways to Gracefully Say Goodbye](#)

- Each partner should reflect upon what the collaboration or friendship has meant to them.
- Schedule a meeting to celebrate the mentoring relationship and both protégé's future plans and the mentor's sense of investment in the next step.
- Mentors can articulate feelings about the protégé, the mentoring experience and the pending transition. These reflections may encourage the protégé to move on with a greater sense of how they will incorporate the mentoring experience into their transition.
- If the mentor takes the lead in articulating their feelings, the protégé is more likely to reciprocate with important emotions or experiences.
- Both partners can discuss the memorable conversations that stand out from the mentor relationship.
- Discuss what most impressed you about your partner?
- Finally, be sure to acknowledge intangible gifts received and lessons learned from each other.
  - A Thank You note to your partner is an excellent way to mark the meaning of this transition.

## Professional Transitions for the Student: From College to Workplace<sup>2</sup>

The transition every student makes from college to career may be easier with a little forewarning about what is ahead. Here is a compilation of college to career issues that you may find helpful to consider.

- [Manage your time](#) – Even though the pressure of constant studying is alleviated, many students struggle with time management on the job. Many employers have rigid expectations about time. Areas that may require adjustment include working an eight hour day, getting to work on time, fewer vacation days, and juggling multiple projects with fast deadlines.
- [Don't burn out](#) – Young professionals tend to work very hard on their first jobs, working late to finish projects and make a good impression. Avoid burn out. Make time for fun, family and physical activity so long hours don't take a toll on your health.
- [Expect an entry-level job](#) - Don't be overly ambitious when deciding what job to take first. Many organizations hire recent grads at an entry level so that they can learn about the company from that position before being promoted.
- [Learn about organizational culture](#) – Learn what the written and unwritten rules are. Every organization has a culture about how things get done—figure out where you fit into yours and what appropriate adjustments are needed.
- [Dress appropriately](#) – Pay attention to how others are dressed—especially those who are further along on your career path.
- [Professionalism](#) – Acting unprofessionally or irresponsibly in college may earn you a bad grade or lecture from a professor; in the workplace, acting unprofessionally can get you fired. Making mistakes is inevitable, just learn from them.
- [Don't be afraid to ask questions](#) – Professionalism requires dependability and initiative. Make it a practice to seek out new information, ask for clarification when needed, and take the time needed to learn from your mistakes. Listen actively.
- [Be a team player](#) – To succeed, you must be seen as a member of the team that can be relied on to do your job. Deadlines are often critical to team and business success.
- [Communication skills](#) –Whether it's answering the phone in a professional voice, avoiding jargon-laced emails or articulating ideas to co-workers or clients, research has shown that your success depends on your ability to communicate.
- [Create value](#) - Organizations hire people hoping they will create value for them so figure out ways to assure them you are doing just that. Sharing details about accomplishments with your boss is one way to keep yourself on their radar screen.
- [Don't be pretentious](#) - Don't pretend to know things you don't, but do your homework. Learn what you need to know.
- [Network your way to a promotion or new assignment](#) –Your colleagues, professional contacts, mentors and supervisors are good people in your network. Get to know other leaders in your industry at professional meetings or conferences too.
- [Take advantage of training opportunities](#) – If your organization offers training, take advantage of it. You'll develop “transferable skills” for later, demonstrate initiative and willingness to learn. You'll also create value for yourself now.

For more information check out these links: Topics include office poliTRICKS, questions to ask before you start, what to know about benefits, office romances, e-mail etiquette, relocating, how to ask for a raise, dealing with discrimination, moving on from the “wrong job,” understanding corporate climate, balancing work and life, personal finance issues, etc.

- [http://www.cce.columbia.edu/alumni/current\\_issues/college\\_work.php](http://www.cce.columbia.edu/alumni/current_issues/college_work.php)
- <http://www.collegegrad.com/>
- <http://www.collegegrad.com/newjob/>
- <http://www.egrad.com/index.cfm?action=subsection&iSubSectionID=61&sectionID=39>
- [http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/firstjob/a/post\\_grad.htm](http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/firstjob/a/post_grad.htm)
- <http://www.black-collegian.com/career/transition2002-2nd.shtml>
- <http://www.egrad.com/index.cfm?action=story&iStoryID=35&sectionID=39&subsectionID=61>
- [http://www.cvtips.com/college\\_to\\_employment\\_transition.html](http://www.cvtips.com/college_to_employment_transition.html)
- <http://www.quintcareers.com/college-to-career.html>

## Professional Transitions for the Mentor: Changes or Transitions?<sup>3</sup>

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According to William Bridges, the author of the book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, there is a difference between making changes in one's professional career and making a transition. He points out that the innovative marketplace depends on change and many people have careers characterized by keeping up with those changes. This sometimes leaves people present-focused and lacking clear direction about the future or their own personal development. This keeps us out of touch with ourselves. Therefore, Bridges writes that we must get in touch with ourselves and our own "inner callings from the future"<sup>4</sup> when we encounter natural transitions points in our lives. If we don't take time for this reflection, we may find ourselves *growing apathetic, continually stressed* or even *depressed* rather than *energized* by our careers. Bridges challenges us to replace old motivations for change (e.g. bottom line results, advancement for better pay, or change for change's sake) with new future-oriented motivations. *Here are some questions he advocates asking ourselves:*

- Rather than adding more to a busy life, what can you let go off in order to make room for something new?
- Are there any dreams, inner callings or aspirations that have been set aside or ignored? Why? What are they about? Is it time to explore one or more of these?
- Try brainstorming to define your core values. Check inner callings against the list. Are there connections?

So, **how** do we identify times of natural transitions in our personal and professional lives so we can make conscious decisions that create meaning and value in our lives, rather than settling or accepting change that may not reflect or support our deeper motivations? Bridges uses the *four seasons of life*—language he borrows from an ancient Hindu view of life-long development—to illustrate how we can find the origin of our "inner callings."

- **The Time of Apprenticeship** – This is a time of ambitious learning and skill development. It usually coincides with one's first job with enough earnings to support an "adult life structure."<sup>5</sup>

**The Shift to Householding** – This season utilizes the lessons learned during apprenticeship and often involves long term commitments in professional, community and personal life. Change in professional life is inevitable (new boss, new company ownership, etc.), but one's own transitions may or may not reflect these professional changes. Again, Bridges suggests that changes (new job or job transfer, for instance) are different than transitions.

- **The End of Householding** – This transition can be seen not only as the shift traditionally associated with career to retirement, but more broadly as a developmental shift that can be experienced at any time during life. It is a shift from ambition to discovery about the lessons of life and it tends to be a gradual process.
- **The Final Chapter** – Reflects the transformation that occurs when we realize that the greatest lessons of life occur during times of transition, when we let go of the superficial things that define us and wait for new ways of living to emerge and new identities to form. Whether or not we change our job or career focus, the *real transformation is our changing identity*.

Bridges suggests that the "final chapter" is about being mindful to learn about ourselves during times of transition. *Here are some questions to build self-knowledge and identify your own natural transitions:*

- What are the indications that your work life is in transition? (Feeling conflicted? New motivations surfacing?)
- If you were to name the personal and career issues that characterize your life now, what would they be?
- What do you need to let go of in order to enter a natural transition in your life?
- What has happened in your life that suggests you are ready to take "the next step"?
- If you were much older and looking back on your life, would this point (now) have been a time in your overall life when it was a good idea to keep going in the same direction or was it a time for change? (e.g. from that distant vantage point would you have encouraged your present self to take more or fewer risks?)

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup>Johnson, W. B. & Ridley, C. R. (2004). *The elements of mentoring*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian. <sup>2</sup>Sources for this section came from an assortment of links on the bottom of page 2 <sup>3</sup>Bridges, W. (2004). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, pp. 77-100. <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 79 <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.90.