

## Member's Quarterly

Winter 2024 Edition

### Perspective

## Virtual Mentoring

*Can it really work?*



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**W**e all know the benefits of having a mentor. Most of us have had a more experienced employee guide us through particularly difficult portions of our careers and help us navigate a new organization or task. Now that we're more seasoned, maybe it's time to mentor others. Before you think that it's going to be a one-way street with you doing all the giving, think again. There are some real, tangible and maybe even surprising benefits to becoming a mentor.

How important are mentors? When things are normal, they are important supports for both individuals who want to grow and the organization itself. However, when things are tough, they are crucial keys to success. One major concern that employers have these days is how does mentoring work when so many employees are working remotely? Can it really be effective with employees who work from home?

The short answer is that with some modification and extra attention, it can be great for both the mentee and the mentor. The biggest challenge is to break down the physical distance and use technology to maintain your connections.

### Make the connection

It will take time to develop a personal relationship with a remote mentee if you haven't had a chance to do that in real time. You may have to work a little harder to break down the natural disconnection that some people feel when they work on their own for an extended period of time. You can accomplish this through regular check-ins using emails, texts or video calls. Even without a formal agenda or plan, this will help build trust and strengthen your working relationship.

When it comes to Zoom or video chatting, you can let people come as they are. That may mean informal dress codes and the occasional pet video bombing a mentoring call. That's just real life for many remote workers. You can try to limit disruptions and distractions, but don't get too upset when they inevitably occur.

### Resist the temptation to do everything

Do you remember how everyone wanted to make sourdough bread or try their hand at organic gardening during the pandemic? Many mentees may want to try some completely new things as they work online or from home. While the mentor should encourage their growth, they may also have to keep them focused. If mentees do decide to write their book while working from home, the mentor could help them plan out the steps and get them started. This way they could learn new skills and refine their project planning processes as they plot their best-selling self-help book.

### Stay focused on the goal

Even with everything that is happening in these constantly changing times for the workforce, it is crucial that the mentor-mentee relationship stay focused on the main goals that you establish at the beginning of the process. Keep your eyes on the prize, but also recognize that there may be additional stress or pressure. You should build more supports into the process to help the mentee stay on track. The employee may need to

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talk a bit more about their personal or career challenges. Give them the time and space to do that. You don't have to fix them, but they may need to talk. You will actually become that listening and comforting ear to let them process those feelings and concerns. Keep their expectations within a reasonable limit and build in small wins that give them encouragement to keep working towards their major goals in your partnership.

There are challenges for both mentors and mentees in a remote relationship, but virtual mentoring can work for both of you. As a virtual mentor, you gain an opportunity to build and practice your own leadership skills. You will be a role model to other workers under your wing and you will have the chance to guide them without being encumbered with a formal management or performance appraisal role. It is almost guaranteed that you will become a better leader and manager after your mentoring experience and totally guaranteed if you work hard at it. Mentoring truly is a win-win scenario even in the virtual world.

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