

# Guidelines for successful Mentoring

Information for Mentees



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### Imprint

Julia Küchel  
University of Bonn  
Staff Unit Human Resources Development, Organizational Development & Health Management  
Poppelsdorfer Allee 31/33  
53115 Bonn

## Mentoring as Part of yourTRACK – A brief Overview

yourTRACK is an qualification program for personnel development that supports junior research group leaders, junior and tenure-track professors during their qualification phase with training, coaching, mentoring and networking opportunities.

### Why mentoring?

In addition to undoubtedly indispensable specialist skills and scientific excellence, academic commitment and teaching qualifications, interdisciplinary skills and very good networks in the scientific community are also important for a career in science. In order to pursue your own academic career in a targeted manner, it is also advisable to develop effective strategies at an early stage. Mentoring has proven to be particularly effective here, as it enables a close exchange with a more experienced person who has already successfully mastered the desired career step.

The mentoring relationship between mentees and mentors focuses on passing on structural and informal (experiential) knowledge, as well as providing advice and feedback, and facilitating access to professional networks.

### General conditions

Junior research group leaders, junior and tenure-track professors have the opportunity to find a mentor for personal support during their qualification phase.

In order to ensure high-quality mentoring, Human Resources Development supports mentees in the search for and finding suitable mentors as part of yourTRACK. These can come from the University of Bonn as well as from other universities. A mentoring relationship is characterized, among other things, by freedom from hierarchy, a conversation at eye level and confidentiality. It is therefore important to ensure that the potential mentor does not have a hierarchical relationship with the mentee.

### Note for evaluation procedures

The mentors are independent and not part of the evaluation process (for TT procedures see [§8, TT Regulations](#)), but serve to provide professional and personal support to the participants. At the request of the TT professor, their mentor can take part in the annual status meeting with the dean.

### Duration of the mentoring relationship

Ideally, the mentoring relationship should cover the mentee's entire qualification period, but at least until the time of the interim evaluation. Regular support through mentoring discussions is particularly useful and helpful during the first 12-24 months in the new role. We are aware that this is a long period of support for mentors. However, the frequency and duration of the mentoring meetings can and should be arranged independently and individually between mentee and mentor, so that the time spent can be fully invested in supporting the respective mentee without any additional obligations.

## Prerequisites for successful Mentoring



### Freedom from hierarchy

Mentoring is about a voluntary exchange and advisory relationship between two people with different levels of experience. Hierarchy-free relationships guarantee that no conflicts of interest arise.

The mentors should therefore be independent and not part of the evaluation process (for TT procedures, see [§8, TT regulations](#)), but serve to provide professional and personal support to the participants.



### Openness

Within a mentoring relationship, not only questions and topics that are also openly communicated to third parties should be dealt with, but above all those that cannot otherwise be addressed but have a subliminal effect. Both partners should therefore have an interest in an open exchange. The mentee should be able to openly address their own insecurities and challenges within the mentoring tandem without having to fear repercussions for their own professional career.



### Trust

The basis for openness in interpersonal relationships is mutual trust. When discussing personal matters such as one's own life path or passing on informal knowledge, the mentee and mentor should always be sure that what has been discussed will not be passed on to third parties without their consent.



### Reliability and commitment

Reliability is an important factor in maintaining a mentoring relationship in the long term. This includes regular contact as well as continuous feedback and adherence to deadlines.



### Reciprocity

Not only the mentee benefits from mentoring, but the mentor can also gain new perspectives and learn about problems and challenges that may not have been recognized before.



### Appreciation and respect

Mutually respectful and appreciative interaction between the tandem partners is the basis for a promising exchange of experiences.



### Voluntariness

Mentoring is based on the voluntary, individual commitment of the mentee and mentor. As this is performed in addition to everyday obligations, it should therefore be valued accordingly by both partners.

## Information for Mentees

As part of yourTRACK, mentees receive individual guidance and support in planning and shaping their own career path. The mentoring relationship not only broadens professional but also personal horizons. In order for the mentoring process to be successful, the following points should be considered:

### Personal initiative and responsibility

As a mentee, you should participate in mentoring out of a clearly justified personal motivation. Participation requires commitment, initiative and personal input. As a mentee, you are also responsible for shaping the relationship and gathering information during mentoring.

### Set goals and make expectations transparent

The mentees set their personal and professional goals independently at the beginning. They receive support and advice from their mentors. A mutual clarification of the respective expectations and opportunities is recommended. The two mentees then decide together which specific topics will be discussed during the mentoring process. If necessary, interim goals are also agreed which the mentee should achieve within a defined period of time.

### Keep in touch

The mentees are the driving force in the mentoring relationship and are responsible for keeping in touch with the mentors and arranging appointments for face-to-face meetings, video calls or telephone calls. This should not only be done when problems arise, but also to report on development statuses.

### Preparation and follow-up

The preparation and follow-up of the meetings/(video) calls is the responsibility of the mentees. They think about topics and questions for the next meeting and send them to the mentor in advance so that they can prepare for them.

Important content and results of the conversation may be recorded in minutes so that they are available for later reflection.

### Attitude

The mentee's attitude should be characterized by openness and a willingness to develop. Those involved do not have to agree on the career path, the next steps, leadership styles, the best way to combine family responsibilities and a career in academia, and much more. - Constructive discussions characterized by mutual appreciation and respect promote confidence and self-assurance in dealing with discussion partners.

### Active implementation

It is at the mentee's own discretion whether they accept and implement the ideas and suggestions of their mentor. However, a fundamental openness and willingness to develop is indicated - differing opinions should be expressed and discussed directly.

## Organizing Mentoring Meetings

The mentee's learning and development process is at the heart of the mentoring relationship, so they also bear the main responsibility for its success. The following generally applies:

- Be professional, active, reliable and appreciative.
- Maintain contact during the mentoring process.
- Provide regular updates to keep your mentor informed about your development.
- Take your mentor's time budget into consideration.

### Getting in touch and making an appointment

- In your first email, briefly introduce yourself, explain why you can imagine this person in particular as a mentor and, if applicable, attach your CV.
- Ask for an opportunity to get to know each other personally and, if necessary, suggest dates or times for this.
- If possible, respond to the mentor's wishes regarding a suitable meeting place.

### Preparation

- Always prepare all contacts carefully.
- Unless otherwise agreed, you also enable your mentor to prepare for the interview by sending the topics to be discussed in advance.





### Initial Meeting

The initial meeting should be used to establish an initial trusting relationship. To this end, both parties should talk openly about their expectations and wishes for the other.

The next step is to jointly identify the topics to be addressed during the mentoring process. It is advisable to agree not only on specific goals (short, medium and long-term), but also on interim goals and key milestones along the way.

It also makes sense to define the conditions for the mentoring relationship in the first meeting. These include, for example, the frequency, duration, type and location of the meetings. It is advisable to record these considerations together in writing in a mentoring agreement (see appendix).

### Interim Meeting(s)

After expectations and goals have been clarified in the first meeting and milestones on the way to achieving the goals have been defined, it is important to evaluate the current situation in subsequent meetings and to compare it with the target situation again and again. Were the previous target agreements helpful? Do other agreements need to be made? Where were or are there problems and a need for support in achieving the objectives? Have any new questions or objectives arisen in the meantime? Are there any important learning experiences or new topics that should be discussed?

The mentoring tandem can also be reflected on from time to time and it can be considered together whether something needs to be changed in terms of communication or support.

### Final meeting

The final meeting serves both to evaluate and assess the agreed objectives and to look back on the mentoring relationship. It also marks an important conclusion to the mentoring process so that both parties can come to an end with their respective roles. Further contact and occasional exchanges between the tandem partners are welcomed and can be arranged individually between mentee and mentor.



## Suggestions for the Choice of Topics for the Mentoring Meetings

### Career development & strategy

- How do I plan my career? What strategy do I have and am I pursuing?
- What expectations should I fulfill? Are there specific requirements?
- What unwritten laws are there that need to be observed?
- Which qualifications may still need to be acquired?

### Work-life balance

- How do I find the right balance between researcher and private individual?
- How can time be used sensibly? How do I plan enough breaks?
- What are time wasters? How do I recharge my batteries?
- How do I deal with stress?

### Leadership

- How do I behave as a manager?
- How do I put my team together?
- What is my role? Are roles clearly assigned in the team?
- What is important to me when working with others? How do I give and receive feedback?
- How can I think and act strategically?

### Research

- How do I sharpen my research profile?
- What short, medium and long-term goals am I pursuing or what goals do I need to achieve?
- Which research and funding programs are relevant for my field?
- What criteria/perspectives do experts and decision-making bodies pursue?

### Teaching

- How do I plan my courses?
- How do I design my teaching portfolio?
- How do I supervise theses and research papers?
- How do I advise and support students?

### Academic self-administration

- In which committees should I be represented?
- What are the pitfalls to watch out for?
- How do I position myself? How do I represent my own agenda?
- How do I present myself confidently and convincingly?

### Networks

- How can I successfully build and maintain my network?
- How do I make contacts quickly and specifically (in the faculty, at conferences, etc.)?
- In which networks should I be represented?

### Communication & self-presentation

- How can I act confidently and authentically?
- How can I communicate clearly?
- How do I deal with conflicts?
- How can I stand up for my goals?
- What rules should be observed during negotiations?



## Procedure: Getting started with Mentoring

- (1) Search for a mentor  
*(HR Development will be happy to assist you with this if required)*
- (2) Approach of the mentor by the mentee or by HR Development
- (3) Arrangement of an initial meeting between mentee and potential mentor to get to know each other and exchange goals
- (4) If the result is positive: signing of a mentoring agreement with concrete goals and agreement on the conditions (frequency, type, location of meetings, etc.)  
*Suggestion: at the beginning every 6-8 weeks, later once a quarter + in the meantime, if necessary, specific questions by email/phone*  
*Suggestion for the duration of the entire mentoring process: at least 18 months, at best until the interim evaluation*
- (5) Registering the mentoring tandem with HR Development
- (6) *If required: Support for the mentoring tandem from HR Development by providing information, advice, assistance or in the event of conflicts*
- (7) Final meeting: Marks the official end and offers the opportunity to take stock.

*If you have any questions about the process, about mentoring as a personnel development tool or about conflicts during the process, the HR Development is always on hand to advise you.*

### How to search for and find Mentors

yourTRACK does not have a pool of mentors; suitable mentors are selected by you as a mentee. This offers the great advantage that you can find a mentor who exactly matches your current mentoring needs. In this way, specific questions and concerns can be dealt with within the mentoring tandem that only this particular mentor may be able to answer.

As a guideline, your future mentor should have already successfully mastered the career step you are currently aiming for. An overview of the criteria for selecting potential mentors can be found on the next page.

You will receive support in your search for suitable mentors from HR Development. They can also contact potential mentors on request.

## Criteria for the Selection of Mentors

Of particular importance for the success of the mentoring relationship is the selection of a suitable mentor by the mentee, which should be as specific as possible in relation to their individual professional and personal goals. Fundamental questions may include

- What advice and support would I like for the next steps?
- What are my areas of development?
- What specific topics would I like support with?

Gender	Would you like a mentor? What is the reason for your preference? Which gender-specific experiences and strategies could be helpful for you?
Professional proximity	How important is specific professional proximity to you? With regard to the mentor, how important to you is integration into subject-specific networks and the availability of special knowledge and informal knowledge of the subject culture, knowledge of methods or knowledge of specialist journals?
Proximity / internationality & networks	How important is physical proximity to the mentor for you? Are you willing to travel there, possibly several times, or is it okay for you to mainly communicate via video chat?
	How important is it to you that your mentor knows the German academic system (or the University of Bonn) or even other academic systems?
	How important is the size of your mentor's professional network to you? Are you already well networked - at the University of Bonn, throughout Germany, internationally?
Experience	What experience should your mentor already have? How important is the academic reputation of your mentor to you?
Responsibility for family / Work-Life-Balance	Would you like a mentor with a family? How important should the issue of reconciling career and family be to her or him? How important is it to you to discuss topics such as flexible work organization, family time management and task sharing?
Personal characteristics	What should the person who will be your mentor be like? What qualities should characterize them?

## Appendix

### Mentoring agreement as part of yourTRACK at the University of Bonn

*Please forward a copy of this agreement to HR Development after signing it. This serves to ensure the quality of the process and our offers.*

Mentee: \_\_\_\_\_ (Vorname Nachname)

And

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_ (Vorname Nachname)

form a mentoring tandem as part of yourTRACK.

#### 1. Mentoring topics and goals of the mentoring process

As part of our mentoring relationship, we want to discuss the following topics and achieve the following (interim) goals:

#### 2. Modalities of the contact

We agree on the mentoring tandem for the period

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

Frequency of meetings: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of the meetings: \_\_\_\_\_

Meetings should take place ☐ in person ☐ via video chat ☐ by telephone

We agree on the specific topics we would like to discuss at our meetings in advance. The mentee is responsible for the preparation and follow-up of the meetings (e.g. making contact, arranging appointments, preparation and follow-up of the topics).

#### 3. Confidentiality

We undertake to treat the content of our discussions confidentially. They are not the subject of status, development or evaluation discussions. We will only discuss the content and topics of our mentoring relationship with third parties if we have expressly agreed to do so. The obligation to maintain confidentiality continues to apply even if we end our mentoring relationship.

#### 4. Termination

If circumstances arise that no longer allow us to continue our mentoring relationship, it can be terminated (prematurely). In this case, we will inform Human Resources Development and, if necessary, seek advice.

## Checklist: Conduct mentoring discussions

### 1. Opening the meeting

- Greeting
- Short, personal exchange
- Clarification of organizational questions if necessary

### 2. Occasion for meeting

- Why and with what aim are we talking now?

### 3. Structuring the meeting

- Defining the topics
- If necessary, exclusion/postponement of certain sub-topics
- Determining the order of the topics to be discussed

### 4. Core of the meeting

- Clarification of the topic (see page XX for topics of discussion)
- Discussion of ideas/solutions/approaches etc.
- Making agreements ("Who does what, by when?")

### 5. Outcome and conclusion of the meeting

- Summary of what was discussed
- Logging of agreements and tasks
- Arrange a new appointment
- Thanks and farewell

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