



Cultivating Relationships to Support Your Growth and Development

Relationships are key to getting anything done in an organizational setting. When it comes to career planning and growth, relationships can make a major difference in your ability to access the information, resources, and opportunities necessary to grow and advance. Consider building and maintaining relationships with individuals to fill the following useful roles.

Mentor

A mentor is a person who provides advice and counsel to another person. From a career planning and development perspective, a mentor can draw from his/her experience and perspective to help you do the following:

- Clarify your career interests
- Identify the knowledge, skills, and experience you need to advance
- Identify and pursue opportunities to grow and develop
- Understand what's required to take charge of your own career
- Understand what's important to being successful in more senior roles
- Get feedback from a more experienced person
- Identify and understand your strengths and areas for development
- Increase your self-awareness and self-confidence
- Reflect on and learn from all situations
- Understand, and succeed in, your organization's culture
- And more ...

Senior leaders will often say that a mentor (whether through a formal program or informally) was instrumental to their career growth and advancement. This is likely to be true for you. The key is to find the right person, in the right job, at the right career level, with the right experience, and with a style and personality that are suited to you and your needs.

Think about what you want in a mentor and consider potential candidates. Identify your top candidate and determine how best to raise the possibility of beginning an informal mentoring relationship. The process of reaching out to someone and arranging for a mentoring relationship is a development activity in itself.

Feedback Partner

Feedback partners can be very useful in helping you understand how you come across to others, in giving you a view of yourself that you cannot see. You might ask a colleague on your team to be your feedback partner.

Specific feedback around observed behavior is best. Ask:

- In situation A when I did or said B, what specifically did you observe about what I did and the impact it had?
- What specifically did I do well?
- What specifically might I have done better?
- What specifically might I do differently in a similar situation the next time?



It is best to get timely feedback, while the situation is fresh. It's also important to view all feedback as a learning opportunity. Whether feedback reinforces what you are doing or is evidence that you should consider new ways of thinking or acting, it can help you learn and grow. Who can be your feedback partner?

Manager

Your manager can play a vital role in helping you grow, develop, and prepare yourself for advancement. Be upfront with your manager about your career goals and your commitment to taking the initiative to grow and to develop new knowledge, skills, and experience.

Indicate that you welcome any and all constructive feedback to help you to better understand yourself, your current performance, your strengths, and your areas for development. When feedback is given, embrace it, reflect on it, learn from it, and work to apply what you have learned.

Demonstrate your initiative to your manager. Indicate your interest in taking on new tasks or responsibilities. Offer your services for special projects. Work to build a mutually beneficial relationship. A manager who can count on you will be more likely to support you, push you, guide you, and be alert to opportunities for you to grow, develop, and advance.

Other Supportive Relationships

- **Cheerleader/Champion:** A person who sees your strengths and the value you bring to the organization and is willing to promote you, advocate for you, and celebrate your contributions.
 - Who are your cheerleaders/champions?
 - How can you make sure your contributions remain visible to them?
 - How can you acknowledge/thank them for supporting you?

- **Peer:** A person at the same level in the organization. You might establish a peer relationship around shared functional responsibilities and challenges or shared career goals. A peer can be a great sounding board. A peer can help you think through challenges, weigh opportunities, consider how to approach an issue or situation, put things in perspective, or look at things differently. A peer may also help by simply listening. Because of your shared circumstances, you might offer to fill the same role for your peer.
 - With whom do you share functional responsibilities and challenges or career goals?
 - How can you develop a supportive relationship with them?
 - How can you ask for their help?
 - How can you help them?

- **Collaborator:** One aspect of positioning yourself for advancement is to get things done that have a positive and far-reaching impact on MIT. In a large, complex organization achieving that requires being able to build and use collaborative relationships.
 - With whom do you collaborate effectively now?
 - How can you use those collaborative relationships to identify and carry forward improvements?
 - Who else would be a good person to collaborate with? How can you establish a collaborative relationship with him/her?
 - What great ideas do you have for doing things better, more efficiently, etc.? Who can help you think through, formulate, and carry forward those ideas? How can you establish a collaborative relationship with them?