



# Institute of Professional Environmental Practice

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## ***Environmental Professional Intern (EPI) Mentoring Guidelines***

“Career success” is the goal of most employees in the work force. This is not just having a job, but a career; and not just a career, but also one that is successful and rewarding. It is now widely accepted that one of the “keys” to attaining career success is to have a mentor. A majority of those with successful careers report that mentoring has been an important factor in achieving their goals.

Mentoring occurs when a senior person in terms of age and/or experience undertakes to provide information, guidance, advice, and support for a junior person.

There are two kinds of mentor relationships:

1. Those that occur naturally (informally) within the organization and develop of their own accord as a senior person is impressed by a junior’s abilities, and lasts over an extended period of time; or
2. Those that are structured and are a part of formal programs.

Hundreds of companies and agencies have adopted formal programs. Some call them *sponsors*, others *senior advisors*, and others *coaches*. However, all agree that this is a key element in employee development. It has been used extensively to foster management training. Mentoring is also instrumental in increasing productivity, reducing turnover, and enhancing communication among all levels and sectors of the organization. Additionally, mentors can help integrate an individual into the profession and build a sense of belonging.

### **Program Objectives** – What do we want to accomplish?

The mentoring program will be structured to address a variety of needs and will promote the following objectives:

- To enhance employee development in early career stages.
- To involve employees at all levels in forming supporting professional relationships.
- To encourage employees to exercise initiative for their own career development.
- To improve morale of participants who gain experience and satisfaction from participation in the program.
- To develop a strong commitment to the mission of IPEP, which is to improve the practice and educational standards of environmental professionals, in all employees who participate in this program.
- To utilize successful senior professionals in professional development of entry-level professionals.
- To enhance the formation of supportive networking and increased sense of belonging.
- To enhance individual development and self-esteem through the encouragement and direction of a strong supportive mentor.
- To develop a thorough understanding of, and commitment to, IPEP’s Code of Ethics.

## Mentors and Mentees

Both mentors and mentees will bring various perceptions of their roles to the mentoring partnership

Ideally, a mentor:

- Is an unbiased advisor available to discuss work-related and other concerns regarding job or career performance.
- Provides constructive suggestions for improving the mentees' work proficiency and productivity.
- Is a source of information about the professional culture and its specific organizational values.
- Provides objective and positive suggestions on appropriate office demeanor and work ethics.
- Helps the mentee grasp the difference between what is really important and what seems to: in other words, perspective. A mentor gives vision.

What kinds of assistance does a mentor provide?

Career advice

Instruction

Visibility

Role modeling

Counseling

Encouragement (boosts self-esteem by believing in mentee)

Confrontation

Opportunities to perform

A mentee:

- Is an individual seeking guidance on career and job issues.
- Participates in the program by taking full advantage of the services and assistance offered.
- Brings to the relationship dedication and a clear understanding of his/her own goals and objectives.

## Participation and Eligibility

EPIs interested in the mentoring program will contact IPEP.

## Selection Process

- **Mentees:** Since this is a completely voluntary program, mentees will nominate themselves.
- **Mentors:** These are also voluntary participants and will nominate themselves.

## Matching Mentee and Mentor

A team made up of members of the EPI Committee and staff will screen mentees/mentors and identify potential matches.

After preliminary discussions with potential mentors and mentees, matches will be finalized.

## Program Length

Each mentoring effort should allow sufficient time for the team to accomplish mutually established goals. Time may vary for each pair, but the one-on-one experience is expected to reach focused goals within the

length of time negotiated by the team. Either member of the team may withdraw at any time. The EPI certificate is valid up to seven years.

### Evaluation

The mentoring coordinator will develop evaluation tools to assess the program. Feedback will be received from both the mentor and the mentee.

A mentor is:

Someone who can assist another person with career and job issues because of a commitment to help others in the same way they have been helped.

A mentee is:

Someone who is seeking help with career and job issues; who asks that another person listen and offer information contacts, support, and, most importantly, their own experience and knowledge.

What can a mentor offer?

Information about:

- A new field or occupation that interests the mentee.
- How the system works, both formally and informally.
- What training is available and how to get it.
- The culture and values of the organization the mentee works for.
- Their experience integrating work and personal goals.
- Organizational history.
- The broader perspectives on priorities and how things fit together.

Contact with:

- Individuals inside a group the mentee wants to work for.
- Individuals in a particular field.
- Professional organizations.
- Books and other printed resources.
- People who share the mentee's interest and concerns.

Support in:

- Coaching the mentee to improve performance.
- Strategizing about how to promote the mentee's goals.
- Advising impartially about problem situations.
- Counseling about different options to pursue.
- Encouraging the mentee to persist and set realistic goals.
- Giving the mentee feedback about he or she comes across.
- Constructively critiquing the mentee's goal and ethics.
- Identifying the opportunities for visibility when appropriate.
- Providing a role model.

Most importantly, mentors help mentees discern and build on their strengths and skills.

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR FIRST MEETING

### Your Purpose

To determine whether the goals, interests, and personalities of the mentor and mentee are compatible, so that expectations will be met on both sides.

### Suggested Subjects

The program is flexible and can include many types of arrangements, from a regular weekly meeting to check in and discuss progress toward goals and other issues, to intermittent contact on an as-needed basis following a few meetings to clarify action steps.

While there is no one way to have a mentor/mentee relationship, it is important that expectations be clear and compatible on both sides. By the end of the first meeting, each should have a feel for the other as a person, and in terms of what they can offer and are asking. Although you probably want to make up your own agenda for what you want to cover in the first meeting, the following are some suggested subjects for consideration:

**Career paths of both people:** How did you get where you are now? What decisions did you make? What influenced your decisions? Do you like what you are doing now? How long have you been in your present position? Did you move here from somewhere else? What do you see as being next?

**Why each person enlisted in the program:** The mentor may have wanted to pass on some of the knowledge and experience they have gained, or may feel a special commitment to support others because of working through the system from the bottom. The mentee may have enlisted because they are unsure of goals, or because of the need for support to achieve a goal that is already clear.

**What the mentee is looking for in a mentor, and vice-versa:** Is the mentee looking for someone who is experienced in a particular field or subject to help advance within that context? Or for someone who is an experienced and empathetic counselor? Is the mentor eager to help someone clarify goals, or work on an action plan with someone who is already on their way?

**What effort each is willing to put in initially:** What time and other limits does each person have? These may change, but it is important to clarify this initially as well as on a periodic basis.

**Prior to ending the first meeting/contact, schedule the next meeting/contact.**

## WHEN TO ASK FOR ASSISTANCE

Your first meeting is essential in establishing common ground and preventing most of the situations discussed below. While many pairs of mentors and mentees are able to work through any issues that may come up, sometimes people do need outside assistance. If something is troubling either of you, it is generally best to first discuss it with the other person. Situations where outside assistance may be helpful include the following:

- One or both of you is not following up. This is a danger signal that the action steps being identified are inappropriate in some way, or that one of you is uncomfortable.
- Serious personal problems are emerging. A mentor can only go so far in helping someone else, and the primary purpose of the program is to deal with employment issues. A mentee may need a referral to a personal counselor or to social services before action in the job arena will become possible.
- There are conflicts in expectations. While these should surface at the first meeting so that inappropriate matches can be avoided, there may be some surprises farther down the line. The mentor may be pushing the mentee harder than the mentee is willing to go, or the mentee may want more direction than the mentor is willing to offer.
- You need more information on contacts, which could be anything from personnel procedures to a statistics expert willing to do an informational interview.

- The relationship is uncomfortable for any reason. For a mentoring relationship to work successfully, it must be positive and supportive on both sides. Whether it is chemistry or a specific dynamic that is causing uneasiness, speak up before it undercuts the whole relationship.
- You may have differences in opinion. One of you may believe that the only way to progress in the system is to “play the game,” and the other may find some aspects ethically unacceptable. If any difference begins to get in the way of the mentoring process, please contact IPEP.

## **MENTORING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### 1. Who can be a mentor?

A mentor is a QEP who is a senior in level or experience (to the mentee) that can serve as a resource and role model to the mentee. The mentor should be able to communicate well, be a good listener, and be committed to assisting and advising the mentee. The mentor should not be in the mentee’s supervisory chain of command.

### 2. Who can be a mentee?

Any interested EPI.

### 3. How will the matches between the mentees and mentors be made? What criteria are used?

The matches will be made based upon information provided by the mentees and mentors. Every effort will be made to match the mentee with the mentor that can best assist with those needs, preferably in the same geographic area.

If someone has a specific person in mind as a mentor, they should be sure to identify this person to IPEP.

### 4. Does a mentee need to know their specific goals and expectations in advance, or can the mentor help them set the goals?

As previously noted, it will help the matching process if the mentee has identified specific goals and needs. However, further definition can certainly occur after the match has occurred. Please note that the mentee is ultimately responsible for identifying what they want out of the mentoring relationship. The mentor can help guide and assist the mentee in this effort, but cannot make those decisions for them.

### 5. Will everything between the mentor and mentee be kept confidential?

Confidentiality is a key component to a successful mentoring relationship. For example, there may be agreement between a mentor and mentee that all discussions are confidential with the exception of information that is illegal or unethical.

There are no reporting requirements. However, it is strongly recommended that the mentee keep their supervisor informed of their general progress and direction, including the time commitment. Good communication between the mentee and their supervisor is a key to a successful mentoring relationship.

### 6. How and when will I find out who my mentor/mentee is?

You will be notified by IPEP regarding the proposed match.

### 7. What happens if I believe that the match will not work?

There is always an initial period of getting to know each other and discussing needs/expectations. At any point in the mentoring relationship that one or both of you do not feel the match is working, please contact IPEP.

### 8. Will my mentor be able to get me a promotion of the job I want?

No. The mentor's responsibility is to steer the mentee towards their career goals and offer suggestions and guidance. There are absolutely no guarantees of advancements, promotions, or reassignments through the mentoring program.

9. When is it time to end the relationship?

The appropriate time to end a mentoring relationship is unique to each such relationship. Each mentor and mentee should discuss this aspect of their relationship. In general, it may be time to end the relationship when it has met the goals and needs of the mentee. The EPI certification expires after seven years.

10. How much time should the mentee and mentor spend together?

This is also unique to each relationship and can vary depending upon the immediate need of the mentee as well as their respective calendars. It needs to be an ongoing topic of discussion.

11. How often should the mentor and mentee meet?

There is no one answer as to the frequency of meetings. Like the prior question on the amount of time, it can vary considerably. It is generally recommended that the mentor/mentee agree upon a regular schedule to meet or that the next meeting be scheduled prior to ending the current meeting. Otherwise, it is very easy for long periods of time to elapse between meetings due to the press of other business.

