



Mentoring Program

Tips to Share on Career Lessons Learned

A Supplement to the Mentor Guide

Welcome

Students are eager to hear your perspectives and learn from professionals who have practical experience in the business world. The Smeal Mentoring Program offers an opportunity to share your real-world situations and lessons learned with your Smeal Protégé.

This guide is a compilation of lessons learned about careers and working as a professional; they have been contributed and compiled by a group of Smeal mentors to spark dialogue for our Mentoring pairs.

Use this guide to initiate conversations with your Protégé across the topics of career lessons:

- The 5 categories are organized in an order that logically flows with a student's activities throughout the school year. Strive to cover all topics in the order they are presented.
- Start by selecting the topics or lessons that resonate most with you, and talk to protégé about your similar experiences and what you learned from them.
- You can also flexibly select topics that are of most interest to your protégé.
- Candidly share your experiences, both positive and negative, what you learned from them, and ideas for your Protégé to consider as they enter the business world.

Categories of Career Lessons Learned

- **Personal Development** – provides tips for developing a working style and enhancing personal development throughout a career. Topics include personal branding, organizational cultures, ethics, integrity, and being true to yourself.
- **Leadership Development** – covers lessons and topics related to being a leader and working with leaders, such as coaching, mentoring, speaking, listening, delegation, and executive presence.
- **Relationship Management** – outlines key learnings and suggestions for building and maintaining relationships in the workplace and for a long-term career. Topics include networking, LinkedIn, diversity, as well as co-worker and manager relationships.
- **On-The-Job Performance** – topics include a variety of tips and lessons for succeeding in the workplace, including professionalism, passion, volunteering, promptness, respect for others, and teamwork.
- **Career Management** – addresses tips, suggestions, and ideas on how to best manage your career. Lessons include short and long-term career planning, lateral moves, transfers, and anticipating change in the workplace.

Personal Development

- **Develop your personal “brand”;** market those elements consistent with your organization’s goals. Be competent, responsive, positive, and have a “can do” attitude. (Be ‘YOU’ and don’t veer from your core beliefs to conform.)
- **Learn as much as possible about YOU** (Meyers Briggs, Birkman, DISC, StrengthFinders, etc.). More insight about your personal style and strengths helps you to better focus your career.
- **Be true to yourself** – learn what fits you best - don’t try to take on a role or style that doesn’t fit you.
- **Learn to accept yourself as you are** – there will always be someone better than you at something.
- **Enhance your brand by becoming recognized for an expertise or specialty.** Consider recognized certifications for an upcoming job change – get those most relevant to your field. Interact with others so that they can experience your skills.
- **Integrity and ethics impact** your personal brand, the organization and your co-workers – improper actions can cause lasting damage to you, your co-workers and even your company.
- **Learn what culture matches you** – cultures differ by teams, depts. & companies. Some work, some don’t.
- **Your career success is almost entirely determined by YOU.** Work hard, make good decisions, manage your career, be professional and work well with others – these skills will go a long way toward your success.
- **Recognize that politics exist everywhere.** The degree of politics does vary within and across organizations. As you have experienced at college or temporary jobs, this will likely continue in the work environment. Learn to understand and navigate politics but always stay true to yourself and on the right side of ethical decisions.
- **Stay out of the rumor mill;** this will enhance your professionalism and your credibility. Vent about organizational items with trustworthy friends that are not part of the organization.
- **You will find yourself in bad situations at times** (manager, role scope, etc.)– get through them and learn from them, it will get better (“this, too, shall pass”).
- **An organization’s culture can be a major determinate** of how you fit and feel about a job. Learn about how company cultures differ, so that you can become aware of what cultures align best with who you are.

Leadership Development

- **Be a leader.** Learn to speak up in meetings – don't hesitate, state opinions, make points, ask questions, ask for clarification.
- **Be aware of your executive presence** (even if you aren't an executive). Communicate with confidence.
- **Learn how to speak in front of groups** – it's a critical skill for success & building confidence. It helps with identifying yourself as a leader.
- **Learn how to listen.** Genuinely consider others' ideas and experience. If you don't fully understand, ask for clarification. No one likes working with a know-it-all.
- **Learn how to be good at documentation/presentations** – format can negatively impact people's perception of your substance.
- **Learn early whether your skills are better suited to being a manager or an individual contributor.** There are trade-offs between them – do what best matches your skills and personality.
- **Be a great boss by being** attentive, helpful and supportive to your team; learn to delegate to your team and help them grow – be a coach.
- **Don't be intimidated by those senior to you.** They could be great mentors, and you can learn a lot about the organization from them.

Relationship Management

- **Proactively build a network both inside and outside your company.** Maintain contact with your network over the years.
- **Actively seek mentoring relationships both inside and outside your organization.** Seek different types of experience to help inform your plans.
- **Use LinkedIn regularly** to connect and stay in touch with your network.
- **Critical for success is to build good relationships** with teammates, clients and management. Encourage and participate in collaboration interactions with others – you’ll learn from others and others will learn who you are and about your capabilities.
- **Develop a strong relationship with your boss,** whenever possible. This will add broader value to your relationship and career.
- **You will have a bad boss or one whose style doesn’t match yours along the way.** Consider organizational opportunities – sometimes it is best to stay focused and get *promoted out* of the position; if opportunities in the organization are limited, you may need to consider external options.
- **If you treat someone in the office unprofessionally,** always apologize to them and mend the relationship quickly.
- **If you work with difficult or challenging co-workers,** it can be hard to change things. Try to minimize the frustration. Proactively schedule an honest, open discussion with him/her to determine how best to work with each other.
- **Embrace diversity.** Working effectively in a diversified work environment is critical to your tenure and advancement. (Diversity comes in many forms: gender, age, race, ethnicity, international vs. domestic team members, position level and type of work experience, etc.)
- **When you disagree with someone** be polite and calmly explain your position vs. battling it out to win. It is OK to “agree to disagree”.
- **Two heads are better than one.** Consult with others on a continuous basis. You often don’t know what you don’t know. The views and opinions of others will help you see different perspectives. Consult, consult and consult!

On-The-Job Performance

- **Step-up and volunteer for special tasks** such as a job/project/assignment you want; don't wait to be asked to do it.
- **Being passionate is a differentiator.** Identify your passion and pursue it. Learn and track what you like/do not like to do at work. Identify the key elements that will make a satisfying career for you—what makes you happy at work?
- **Be a professional and treat everyone with respect.** This means being nice to everyone (both above and below you).
- **Be excellent at follow-up** – always respond and reply promptly to *everyone*. Return emails and phone calls; it is polite and respectful.
- **Always be a team player.** Don't worry about being personally identified for your contributions to the team. If you help others achieve their objectives, you are more likely to be identified as an up and coming leader in your organization.
- **Show your commitment** but don't work outrageous hours (unless it's really necessary). Work-life balance is *critical* to sustaining your passion for your life's work and motivation to work over the long haul.
- **Learn how to recognize when it's time to make a change** – don't waste time hoping things will get better when reasonable attempts to improve the situation have not worked. Keep in mind that changing positions every 2-3 years is normal (this may vary by company or professional focus). Explore changing positions without changing companies (same or other business units, location, departments).
- **Continually ask for feedback from peers, management and your boss.** If your company offers a 360-evaluation, participate in it. Bear in mind, different people and roles within and external to your company may need/want different things from you.
- **Be results-oriented.** Demonstrate your capabilities by completing tasks, projects, etc. with good quality.
- **Punctuality and preparedness** shows professionalism and respect for others.

Career Management

- **Be very proactive about managing your career.** It is your career, take control and manage it (no one else will take ownership like you will).
- **Careers can take unexpected turns,** which is why it's especially important to manage your career. Opportunities happen because someone is in the right place at the right time, **but**, opportunities generally visit those who are ready. Therefore, be prepared (build skills, experience, networking).
- **Know when it's time to move-on from a job:** trust your instincts. Many consider it beneficial to change positions every 2-3 years (note: may change based on company, profession and seniority level).
- **Know when it's time to take a break** – a sabbatical or a few months between jobs can work wonders to refocus and re-energize.
- **Seek to define where you want to be in 3-5 years;** develop plans/pathways for how to get there. Regularly re-assess your near and long-term plans. Your needs and plans may change and you will need to make adjustments for these changes.
- **If you are unsure of your long-term goals/plans,** annually evaluate what you enjoy doing and define what additional experience, skills and exposure could help you broaden your perspective and capabilities. This will help to enhance your flexibility and adaptability to new roles.
- **Don't rush to be promoted** – careers can be long, there is plenty of time to do it all.
- **Lateral jobs (or even a step back) are good if** you develop needed skills or gain valuable experience; it's also OK to change career focus if you find a better area of interest for yourself.
- **Branch out. Anticipate change. Re-tool when necessary.** Stretch yourself – don't be afraid to try new areas – that's how you learn what works best for you. Never put all your eggs in one basket. Keep yourself up-to-date and multi-disciplined whenever possible. But watch out for stretching yourself too thin as you might come across as too superficial.
- **Try to work at big, mid, and small companies** to help learn what environment suits you best.
- **An advanced degree and reputable company names help** open doors for your career. It is helpful to tool and retool throughout your career.
- **Take advantage of job benefits such as** training/certifications, transfer abroad (“expat”) and horizontal internal transfers for breadth of experience.